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The Heart of Sally Temple

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The Heart of Sally Temple

By

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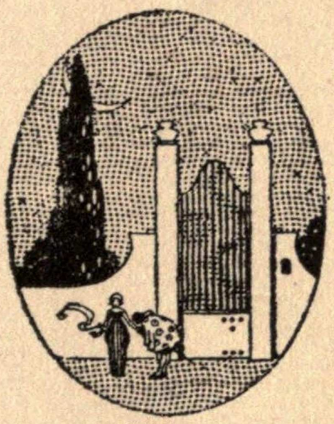
Author of
The Man in the Tower,
The Count at Harvard



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TO

G. E. M.

Who Heard This Story
First in the White
Mountains

2130267

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	Turtle-Doves in Vauxhall Gardens	9
II	The Lady Goes to Cumnor . . .	29
III	Romsey Meets His Ward	49
IV	The Masterful Man at Home . .	64
V	The Lady Hears Commands . . .	79
VI	Lord Verney Shows His Mettle .	95
VII	The Results of an Indiscretion .	111
VIII	The Dragon Proves His Title . .	123
IX	The Flight of the Lady . . .	134
X	Overseen from an Arbor . . .	146
XI	The Encounter at the Inn . . .	155
XII	The Wind in Pump Lane . . .	165
XIII	Oliver Pipe's New Smith . . .	176
XIV	The Evil Seeds in Cheapside . .	188
XV	Sally's Problem	205
XVI	A Landlord Visits His Tenants .	216
XVII	The Supper at Richmond . . .	228
XVIII	Grote Gives Chase	245
XIX	A Night's Events in a Great House	257
XX	The Drama in Pump Court . . .	271

The Heart of Sally Temple

THE HEART OF SALLY TEMPLE

PART I

I

TURTLE-DOVES IN VAUXHALL GARDENS

THE accident happened just outside Vauxhall Gardens late in the afternoon. The rear axle broke, and let the coach down in the road with a prodigious thump. But the coachman knew his business, and had his horses stopped within a dozen yards. It was well he had, for the thump and the subsequent bumping were enough to have shaken the nerves of a stronger woman than Lady Pamela Tree, even had she not been in such a novel situation. The lady gave a shriek and shut her eyes. She did not have to reach out to anyone for protection, inasmuch as she was already in the arms of a young gentleman, and seemed likely to cling there forever.

Even such a delicious burden, however, could not make the gentleman forget that he was reclining on

the flat of his back, with his feet sprawling in air. "Be calm, my love!" he exclaimed; "all the danger's past! Open your eyes a moment;" and therewith he gently disengaged himself, and reaching his hand to a strap that now hung above him he pulled himself to his feet. He thrust the coach-door open. "Now, dearest Pamela, your hand. It's only a broken axle, and the horses are standing quite still."

The lady was very pale, but she contrived to reach his hand, and then to step out of the down-set coach. A crowd had meantime gathered round. Charles Tree glanced them over, and then beckoned one forward. "A crown if you'll fetch me another coach here," said he to this one. And to the coachman he added, "Get some of these lads to help you with the wreckage."

With that he looked down at the Lady Pamela, and straightway all thoughts of the broken carriage flew from his mind. "Let us get through these people to some retreat," he murmured, and pressed the hand that rested on his arm a little closer to his side.

Being opposite the gate of Vauxhall Gardens, it was very natural that Mr. Tree should lead his fair companion within the hedges, and find a seat that was not too small for two, nor yet large enough for three. The seat was under a laburnum, and well withdrawn from the mall where the gay people walked. Mr. Tree seated the lady, and then, drawing a handkerchief from his pocket, touched his face with it. The

afternoon was warm for early June. "Pam," said he, "your eyes are like the sea when it's most blue and tender. You are the sweetest woman in the world!"

She lost her pallor in a sweeping blush, and the eyes were hid for a moment under their lashes. Charles Tree stood looking at the slender lady, gowned in saffron, with a little chain of gold about her throat. "And to think that I—" said he, "rude, rough I —"

She reached her hand quickly toward him. "No, Charles, no. Indeed I am no wonder! Only a very simple girl who —"

"Yes," said he, bending lower, "who —"

"Sit down," said she, "while I finish."

He sat down; and she whispered the end of her sentence to him. After that the two murmured and were silent just as they had been in the coach before that momentous axle took it in mind to break.

The Gardens had many eyes, and although the laburnum was far from the mall, some of those eyes were roving and inquisitive. Presently a young man, walking between two others, stopped, and shot a glance in that direction. Then he whistled. "Can that be Charles Tree?" said he, nodding his head.

"In buff and blue?" asked one of the others.

"Sitting extremely close to the lovely female?" inquired the third. "Egad, that's Charles's favorite attitude nowadays."

"I'm no spoilsport," began the first, "but if it is Charles —"

"We certainly ought to know," finished the second.

"There's a path that will bring us not too close," suggested the third, pointing with his tasseled walking-stick.

The three young blades walked down the path, pretending to look anywhere except at the laburnum. Presently one murmured, "It is Charles, the rake!" "He has her hands in his!" muttered another. The third at length broke the silence with a whispered, "Damme, if it isn't Lady Pamela Vauclain!"

By now they had gone past the direct view of the seat below the laburnum. "I think," said one of the gentlemen, "since it is the Lady Pam, we ought to give Charles a warning."

"But not surprise them too quickly," suggested one of the other two.

"We might walk to the gate, turn about, and come back whistling," proposed the third.

That they did; and therefore, shortly after, three gentlemen of fashion reappeared on the path, walking arm in arm, and whistling loud enough to charm all the thrushes in the Gardens.

The Lady Pamela heard them, and gave Charles Tree a tiny push. Then he also heard them, and turned his head in their direction. That was the

cue for the three conspirators, and they immediately left their path and crossed over to the little bench.

The gentlemen swept their high-crowned hats from their heads, and bent to their waists. Said the first, "A rare pleasure indeed to find you here, Lady Pamela, and my brave Charles Tree."

"Town has missed you sorely," said the second, tapping his lacquered top-boots with his malacca stick.

And the third: "We have no roses in London like those at Cumnor Place."

Lady Pamela blushed, although she struggled not to. "My Lord Dorset, Lord Verney, and Sir John Gorham," said she, looking at each in turn, "you took us quite by surprise, I do declare."

"And Charles," suggested Lord Verney, smiling knowingly, "is cursing the luck that sent the three of us this way."

That was, indeed, what Charles was doing; but he waved the base notion from him as politely as he could. "My coach broke an axle," said he, "and we stepped into the Gardens while they fetched another for us."

"And chose a seat where you couldn't possibly see any coach at all?" queried Sir John. "Come, Charlie, it's best to speak the truth to such old friends as we."

Mr. Tree looked at the lady, and instinctively her

eyes turned to him. Thereupon his eyebrows rose in a question. "Shall I tell the truth," he asked; "the whole truth?"

Lady Pamela, her interlocked hands lying on the lap of her silken gown, suddenly fell to an intense study of the tip of a beaded slipper that just stole from under her skirt. She nodded her head; and then she blushed furiously. "No, Charles," she said quickly. "Yes, Charles. Oh, dear me, use your own best judgment, sir!"

She looked so adorable in this confusion that Charles almost lost his tongue. But he made an effort, rose, and confronted the three men. "The town would know by nightfall anyhow, and so I'll give you old friends the start of it. The fact is that Lady Pamela and I were wed at three o'clock this afternoon."

The star-eyed, rose-flushed lady received a bow from each of the gentlemen, and Charles Tree several slaps on the back and hearty handshakes. Lord Verney laughed. "And so the broken wedding-coach brought you to Vauxhall Gardens instead of to the Elysian Fields," he chuckled.

Sir John Gorham's eyes twinkled. "And we three came over expressly to warn you that you might be overseen!" he exclaimed.

"May not a man look at his own wife?" demanded Charles, and suited the action to the words. But Lady Pamela would not look at him; instead, her

eyes followed her slipper as it swung from under her skirt.

The rubicund Earl of Dorset, moon-faced and round-eyed, as if to relieve the situation, changed the subject. "So you overcame the dragon at last, did you?" said he. "I had my doubts of his consenting. Rumor said he couldn't swallow your mother's son, Charlie. 'Better my cousin Pamela was a lady nun that Lady Pamela Tree!' was the message I heard he sent home from abroad."

"So he did say," agreed Tree, frowning. "He hates my family, though he doesn't know anything about me."

"But he did consent to the wedding at last, eh?" questioned Gorham.

The bridegroom shook his head. "No, Jack, he hasn't. I don't believe he ever would. What he did was to send word that he was coming back to Cumnor from Italy at once. And as we were both afraid of what he might do when he got here, we determined to wed at once."

"Is the Lady Pamela of age?" asked Gorham.

"Not for a fortnight yet, Jack. That was a stumbling-block; but I found a complaisant vicar. To make the matter absolutely formal, we'll be wed again on Pamela's birthday. But we didn't dare wait, with him almost here."

The lady looked up at the men beseechingly. "They say he's terribly savage, and much more

Italian than English," she put in hurriedly. "He might have locked me up, or sent me to a convent; and I've no liking for solitude, and not much taste for religion, I'm afraid."

"And a real taste for Charlie Tree?" suggested Sir John. "Indeed, if I'd been in your place I'd have felt exactly the same."

Lord Verney, lank and dark, his hands behind him, and twirling his stick like the arms of a windmill, gazed at the bride and groom. "That all sounds very well," said he, banteringly, "but when the dragon does come home, what if he gobbles you up, makes a meal of you, takes the law to you for flouting him so, and shears the lady of her golden fleece of lands and holdings? It's no light matter to make a dragon angry." He shook his head at the pair.

"That's what the solicitors hinted," agreed Tree. "If they had a month they might secure some of Lady Pam's property for her, they said; or if only three weeks they might get something; but when we thought how he might be here any day we didn't dare take the risk of waiting even that long."

"If only," said Lady Pamela, clasping her hands and gazing at Sir John Gorham as if she thought him the wisest of the three, "we could gain a little time! If we knew what he was really like, we might win him over. But when he comes to Surrey, and finds me gone, and into the bargain wed to Charles—"

She shrugged her shoulders and shook her pretty head distressfully.

Lord Dorset, whose tongue was as frank as his round face, laughed freely. "He'll be as mad as a bull at a baiting," he declared.

The shrewd Sir John was pulling his chin. "And the black Marquis of Romsey is no child's bogie-man," said he.

"But she's mine by Mother Church now!" exclaimed Charles Tree. "I only did what any lover would do!"

"Doubtless, Charlie," said Sir John, nodding. "But you're both in a pretty pickle nevertheless." He frowned, and drew a pattern on the walk with his stick. "See," said he, "the Marquis of Romsey comes home from abroad and goes to Cumnor. He finds his fair cousin and ward has fled and married. Such a paragon of a cousin! Such a rascal of a husband! He sets to work to make an example of her, and within the fortnight lays hands on her estate to pay her for flouting him. There's no knowing what he might do to her for the clandestine wedding. It looks to me as if all the law would stand on his side."

"And all because I wasn't born two weeks earlier!" said Lady Pamela. "How preposterous! The man hasn't seen me since I was in a cradle. Why, he doesn't know if I'm blonde or dark."

"The more distraught he'll be," declared the gallant Verney, "when he sees what he's lost."

"Has not seen you?" repeated Sir John slowly. "Then if it's only a little time you want, why not—oh, that's a splendid thought!" He chuckled delightedly, and thumped his stick on the ground. "Why not have another Lady Pam to greet him? That'll deceive him for a fortnight, or perhaps a month, and in that time you can put the business right!"

They all stared at Sir John, thinking that he was chaffing; but his face was serious.

"But if Romsey found that out wouldn't he be ten time madder than ever, Jack?" expostulated the Earl of Dorset, his eyes very round.

"Still, it's a gambler's chance; and the stakes are high, and worth winning."

"It's a wild scheme," murmured Verney, looking as if he rather liked the idea.

"So was the wedding in this fashion," said Sir John. "What do you say, Charles? Will you try the game?"

Mr. Tree was much put about. "It's a mad plan. . . . Yet a little time would save the situation. . . . If he found it out the business would be worse than ever. Yet it might work —"

Here Lady Pamela broke in. "But, gentlemen, where is such another woman?"

That brought them up with a halt. "Aye,

Jack," said Verney, quickly, as if the idea had occurred to him at the same moment, "where is she?" "Catch her first, Jack," said the slower Dorset. Tree shook his head dubiously. "Where could we find a second Lady Pamela?" he queried.

Sir John admitted that they had set him the very devil of a problem. The woman must be young and pleasing, able to dissemble, and of sufficiently good address to hold a man's attention. She must have courage, since it was well known that the Marquis was a very strange, not to say a very savage, man. So Sir John reflected aloud, while the lady nodded acquiescence, and the three men pretended to be helping him to think.

"I fear me," said Sir John at last, "there is no such woman." He cast his gaze skyward, he took a few strides up and down the grass, and he looked across at the mall. Suddenly he stopped pacing, and struck his walking-stick a dramatic thump on the ground. "I have the woman, lads, the very girl in a million! Who but Sally Temple? Who but Sally? And see, there she is!"

They all followed his glance to the mall. A young woman was walking down it, a man by her side. The young woman appeared to be laughing.

"Wait here," said Sir John, "while I fetch her;" and straightway he darted across the grass to the promenade.

The young woman in the cherry gown and the

broad straw hat tied with cherry ribbons was laughing at her companion when Sir John arrived. "Oh, Sally," said the latter, excitedly, "you come in the nick of time!" He stood before her, barring the way, his cone-shaped hat at his hip.

The girl stopped, her right hand caught to her breast. "Oh, la, how you startled me! Why, it's Sir John Gorham!"

"Jack, Sally, Jack!"

"Faith, Jack, then." The girl's eyes shot him a mischievous, mocking glance. " 'Tis so long since we met I was not sure."

"I've been in the country, Sally. It seems an age!"

She threw up her hands in mock despair. "Why folk seek the country when there's town is beyond my thinking! I misdoubt, Sir John, if you've met Mr. Willis of Drury Lane Theatre?"

The two men bowed; and Sir John turned again to Sally. "I've a favor to beg," said he. "Lady Pamela Tree, who's sitting under that laburnum yonder, has heard of Mistress Sally Temple's acting, and has asked me to present her. Will Mr. Willis surrender you to me?"

"Will you, George?" asked the girl. She nodded, as if replying for him. "Of course you will. It was a perfect stroll, and I did enjoy it. If I do Sir John this favor, he shall take me home. Get me another

part at the Lane as soon as you can; I've no need of resting any longer."

She judged rightly that Mr. Willis, as a fellow player, and fully cognizant of the importance of a wide acquaintance for a budding actress, would not take offense at this dismissal. "If I had the say you'd play every night," said he; and, with a bow to her and one to Sir John, he took himself away.

"A dear fellow," exclaimed Sally, "and such a romantic air as he can manage! On my word, Jack, Willis will be a star himself some day."

"There can be only one star in our sky—you, Sally," said Sir John, and putting his arm at her disposal, he bore her across the grass to the watching group.

Lady Pamela, viewing the actress from a rather critical standard, yet found her very blooming. She recognized a formidable rival even to her own loveliness, and judged that the young woman had good sense as well as looks.

"Lady Pamela Tree, Mr. Charles Tree, Mistress Temple," announced Sir John. The bride smiled a welcome, Mr. Tree bowed, and the other two men, each of whom was already numbered among Sally's victims, bent over her little mittened hand.

Sally made a curtsey, smiling back at Lady Pamela, and nodded, her eyes lit with laughter, at each of the three men.

"Come sit with me," invited the lady.

Sally did as she was bid, wondering what particular mischief might be afoot. Something amusing was in the air she had felt as soon as she had seen Sir John Gorham's mates.

"Matters are in a muddle," said Sir John, poking the point of his walking-stick into the soft turf, and leaning on it while he looked at Sally. "We thought perhaps you would help us out. This is how they stand." Quickly he sketched the situation to her:— Lady Pamela, the cousin and ward of the Marquis of Romsey, who had lived in Italy almost ever since she was born; Lady Pamela marrying Charles Tree, whom Lord Romsey hated because of an ancient falling out between the two men's fathers; the Marquis's arrival almost immediately, a few days before the Lady's coming of age, and the great need of keeping him in ignorance of the wedding for a fortnight at least. Then Sir John let fall his bomb. "And we all want you to be the unwed Lady Pamela at Cumnor Castle, and so gain the time we need."

Sally let the words sink in. Then she laughed as she looked at each of the men in turn, and finally at the woman who sat beside her. "Is he mad?" she asked; "or do you all want to play some prank on me?"

"No, no," answered Lady Pamela, "we're most serious."

"No one could play the part as you could," urged

Sir John. "You play the Lady of Cumnor for a month, and I'll see you're as well paid for each performance as the star at Drury Lane. And if you'll do us the favor of trying it there's a necklet of pearls shall be my small gift for your kindness, Sally."

"And a ruby ring from me," said the Earl of Dorset, not to be outdone.

"And a girdle to match your hair," added the romantic Verney, "if such is to be found."

Charles Tree bent forward pleadingly. "If you'll do it," said he, "you'll be helping my wife and me from a very bad predicament."

Sally's cheeks were red as roses, and her eyes danced as she surveyed them all. "Why, you're as mad as March hares," said she. "I never heard tell of a plot so ridiculous!" She drew out that last word to an amazing length.

Sir John looked somewhat abashed, but he stood to his guns. "Even ogres don't eat women nowadays," said he, stoutly.

"I don't believe Romsey's half so black as he's painted," observed the mild-voiced Earl.

"He cares little for your sex, I understand," contributed Charles Tree, "so, after you'd greeted him you could let him quite alone."

Lady Pamela's hand touched that of Sally. "But I shouldn't like you to run any peril on my score," said she.

"Peril?" echoed Sally. "And, pray who is this man-monster, then?"

Mr. Tree took it upon himself to answer. "Romsey's lived abroad so long none of us know him. By my lady's pardon, the men of his house have a name for wildness. This one had an Italian mother, and he has chosen to stay in Italy, some say because the wild life there suited him better than our English ways."

Lady Pamela added, "He should be something over thirty, unwed, dark and tall."

"Just my notion of an Italian brigand," observed the stout little Earl. "A most uncomfortable sort of man to have in London."

Mistress Temple looked at them reprovingly, the lines of her pretty mouth drawn into a pout. "And you would have me live alone in the house with such a monster?" she said. "Why, I thought you had more feeling for me, Sir John. A poor, simple creature such as I."

Sir John appeared embarrassed. "Egad, perhaps I was wrong to suggest it," he admitted. "But the plan did seem to me the one way out of the muddle. I forgot Romsey was so black a creature."

Sally's eyes, veiled by long lashes, studied her lap. "You would like to cage a poor girl with a fire-eating monster out of Italy, a girl who's only known the simple folk of Cheapside and the elegant gentlemen of St. James's."

"On my word," broke in Verney, "it's a shame!"

She did not heed him. "You'd match the wits of such a one," she went on, "who's hard put to it to hold her own against such elegant gentlemen, against the malice of a brigand from Italy, and not from Vauxhall Gardens, your dour Marquis of Romsey, your dare-devil man!"

"I crave your pardon," cried Sir John, now very apologetic.

Sally lifted her head, her crown of red-gold hair showing beneath her straw hat. Her eyes were swimming-bright, and her lips curled scornfully. "Very good, my masters!" said she. "I'll take your offers, a necklet of pearls, a ruby ring, a golden girdle, and the pay of a star at Drury Lane for my acting. I'll be ward and cousin to your Marquis. And I'll show you that Sally Temple, if she does come from Pump Lane, isn't afraid of any man alive!"

Silence followed this outburst, while Sally regarded each of the men defiantly. Lady Pamela, whom she seemed almost to ignore, had instinctively drawn away a little.

The Earl of Dorset, his round face filled with the frankest admiration, was the first to speak. "And you can do it, Mistress Temple," he declared. "You'll so bewitch Romsey that he won't have time to think of this or that or t'other. Oh, I know, I know!"

Lord Verney sighed. "I wish I were to live in

Cumnor in the Marquis's place!" said he, casting regretful eyes at Sally.

Sir John, however, shrewder than the rest, was frowning and rubbing his cheek. "Be gentle with him, Sally," he entreated. "Let sleeping dogs lie. It's ill to rouse an unknown man too far."

The mocking lights in the girl's eyes changed to an injured glance. "You think me apt to be rude and forward, Sir John?" At the moment she was the very picture of simplicity, so naïve and ingenuous that Lady Pamela pressed her hand. "Are you very sure," said the lady, "that you want to do this?"

Sally smiled at her. "I think it will be delicious. I'll play the part better than any I've done at Drury Lane. Don't be concerned for me, my lady."

With that she rose. "Sir John will see to the business. He's my new manager," she continued. She shook her head at the three cronies. "Ogres don't eat women nowadays, you know," said she, "and Little Red-Riding Hoods don't come from London Town."

"I'll attend to all the business," said Sir John, "and call at Charles Tree's to-morrow noon for a note from his lady to the housekeeper at Cumnor." He offered his arm to Sally.

The girl nodded to Lady Pamela and the three men, and, taking Sir John's arm, bore away, as graceful as a sloop upon a summer sea.

The three men watched her, until the lady gently pulled at Mr. Tree's sleeve. "The coach must be waiting by now, Charles," she suggested.

The girl and the gallant swept through the gate of the Gardens. "Are you angry with me, Sally?" asked Sir John.

"Why, Jack, why should I be angry? Haven't you helped me to a star part?"

"I don't know why. But from what you said about elegant gentlemen, looking at me, and the way you said it —"

She glanced at him, and smiled. The cherries on her straw hat bobbed. "So that's it, eh, Jack? Oh, dear me! Some day, when we've nothing better to do, I'll teach you the first letters of the sex's alphabet, when a girl's in earnest, when she's not, and so forth. It's something you should know."

"I wish I could teach you something, Sally," said he. "Can't you look a little more kindly on poor me?"

"And do lovers send their ladies into danger?" she asked mischievously.

"I wish I hadn't suggested it," he said. "I don't want you to be under the same roof with that man. Let's tell them you won't do it."

"And spoil their honeymoon—and my lark!" she protested. "I thought there was more sport in you, Jack."

"Where you're concerned I'm like water," said he.

"Then I must be adamant for the two of us," she

retorted, laughing. "Come, Jack, smile. It'll be a merry game, and I'm eager for it!"

Sir John was forced to put up with that conclusion, and in the sunshine of Sally's charming company such misgivings as had occurred to him quickly winged away.

II

THE LADY GOES TO CUMNOR

THE dwellers in Pump Lane were largely out-of-doors when Sir John Gorham brought Sally home. Children played in the street, men sat in the doorways of their dwellings, women leaned from windows to secure better views, and sweethearts whispered and laughed and looked unutterable things without regard for any audience. Taken all in all, the Lane, from its upper end in the high street to its lower end in Pump Court, was very much like any other slice of the world. There were publicans and Pharisees, philosophers and fauns, Dame Grundys, and a Columbine or two. Yet, as a whole, the Lane thought well of Sally Temple. It should have, in all conscience, for Sally always thought most highly of it.

There were women, to be sure, who murmured that Sally was no better than she should be, not so good perhaps. But that opinion was probably due to her hair, that shone like gold and caught men's eyes like gold when she walked in the Lane uncovered, her eyes that danced when she was merry, and were always

filled with light, her fair smooth skin, and her lips that loved to smile. More than that, she was of slender, supple figure, had an instinctive knack for dressing, and was an actress, when comedies were playing, at Drury Lane. Yet more, Sally was understood to be popular with certain gentlemen who hailed from St. James's, and to have made excursions into that frivolous world that lay in the west of London. Therefore some shook their heads and whispered that it was easier for any other woman in the Lane to reach Heaven than for Sally Temple.

Sir John Gorham and Sally descended from the coach in the high street, and turned into the narrower thoroughfare. The gentleman walked by the young woman's side, not as other young men walked, higglety-pigglety as it were, but with an air that was at once deferential and protecting. More heads appeared at windows, and a number of doorways stopped their chatter. A gentleman was seeing Sally home, a gentleman who wore a great silk stock about his throat, and a claret-colored coat with yellow Hessians, and who spoke and laughed not loudly, but in a genteel way.

"Poor Sally," said Mistress Kilgore to her husband, "she'll be scorching her pretty fingers, or I much misdoubt!" But the worthy carpenter shook his head dubiously. "I'll back Sally to scorch the gentleman's first," said he.

They came to the little door of Sally's home, and

Sir John took off his hat. "It's settled then," said he. "Day after to-morrow I come for you at ten with my chariot and take you down to Cumnor. Lady Pam is about your height, and she left great chests of clothes behind her. Buy what you need to-morrow." Here he pressed some gold pieces into her hand so deftly that Mistress Kilgore, although she lived directly across the way, thought he was only bidding Sally an affectionate farewell.

For one moment Sally weakened. "Can I really do it, Jack?" she asked. "Can I really play such a lady?"

"Can you? Could you fail in anything? There's not a lady in London wouldn't barter her graces for your beauty, Sally."

She interrupted his ardor. "I'm only a passable actress after all, Jack." She looked at him very straight. "You see I am town born and bred. I love these streets, and the crowds of people in them. I'm afraid I'll be lonely in the country, with nobody to keep me company. A lady can't consort with milk-maids, can she?"

Sir John saw his chance, and jumped at it. "Then, Sally, I'll go down to Surrey too. I'll keep watch, and see you whenever I can. Maybe Romsey won't forbid me his house as he did Charles. If he doesn't I'll keep you company."

"That would be a great comfort. Don't forget, Jack. Good-night."

"Good-night, my lady." Sir John bent and kissed her mittened hand. Then the gentleman returned down the Lane, the cynosure of all eyes.

Sally unlocked her door, crossed a tiny hall, and entered the low-ceilinged and small-windowed room that fronted on the street. By what light filtered through the little panes a man was reading a book. He was young; but his face was pale and careworn. Long black hair was brushed away from a broad brow, and his eyes, large and dark, shone as he looked up at Sally. At the back of the room, by an open window that gave on to an infinitesimal court, sat a woman drinking a cup of tea.

Sally's straw hat, with the cherries on it, was flung upon a settle. "Such a day!" she exclaimed, "such a day! And you there, Kate, with your dish o' tea just as usual."

"You're late to sup, Sally," said the woman. "We waited until sundown."

"Dearie me, I wish we supped when the gentry do. It's the sweetest hour of the day to be abroad. I've been to Vauxhall Gardens. No, never you mind, Kate, I can get what I want myself."

So she did, frying a slice of ham over the glowing embers on the hearth, dishing out vegetables from the pot on the hook, and pouring a cup of tea. As she sat at the table she talked. "I went out to Vauxhall with George Willis. He tells me there'll soon be a new piece at Drury Lane, and he'll try to get me a good

place in it. He's so devoted. We had cherry tarts and little round French cakes. You should have seen the roses, Kate! And oh, Gilly, he pointed me out a French poet there. I've forgot the name, but Willis says he's quite the fashion."

"It wasn't Willis brought you home," said Gilbert Stanes.

"So you were watching, then? I thought you'd no eyes for what went by in the Lane."

"This was a gentleman."

"Yes, so he was. He carried me off from Willis, and he brought me home. Did you notice his manner of bowing, Gilly, dear?" Sally rose from the table, and pretended to sweep a hat from her head as she bent to the waist. "It was Sir John Gorham. He's a merry gentleman and thinks himself very wise; and when he purses his lips so, and wrinkles up his eyes so, and says 'I must consider,' why, other folks think him wise too. But often I have to laugh at him."

"Men aren't always so simple as you think them, Sally," said Gilbert, glancing through the window, "and these gentlemen have little to do but plan how to flatter women."

"There now, listen to my nephew! Gilly, don't you think I'm a match for any of them?"

Gilbert regarded his pretty young aunt with gravity. "You are to-day, Sally," said he, "but some day one of them might mean more to you, and then—you'll not be so well protected."

Sally blushed. "Oh, it will never be one of these gentlemen! They may have my smiles, that's an actress's wares, but my heart—oh, la, that's quite a different matter!"

Thereupon she turned to the table and soon had it cleared, and the supper dishes washed and put away. Kate, her older sister, a woman gifted with a tongue of silence, finished her tea, and went above-stairs to her own chamber.

The room was now so dark that Gilbert could no longer see to read, and shut the book on his knees. His reflective eyes seemed to be studying the Lane. Meantime Sally was busy with a dozen small domestic tasks, seeing to the fire on the hearth, putting away her cherry hat, ordering the household for the night. Presently she stopped in front of a small mirror that hung near the rear window. There was just enough twilight for her to see herself. She put up her hands to her hair, loosened it, drew the long strands through her fingers, and then wound it in a new pattern.

There were two windows looking into the Lane, and when Sally had finished with the mirror, she placed a high-backed chair by the casement opposite Gilbert's, and sat down. She glanced at the young man's face, seeming to consider some project. Although he was the son of her sister Kate, he was Sally's own age, and they were confidants. In addition, he was the only man in the household.

"I'm going to talk a matter over with you, Gilly," she said, after a pause, "because I can trust you as I would myself. So you think I take too much hazard, do you?"

"I know you are very pretty, and I know that men are always hunting beauty."

"That has the smack of your books to it, Gilly. We must all take some chances. Are you really afraid for me?"

"Should I be sitting quiet if I were, Sally?"

Her eyes shone. "Thinking of you has helped me a great deal before this. And now promise that you won't tell what I'm about to do."

He nodded his head. "If you want me to," he agreed.

Sally looked through the window. She could see Mistress Kilgore, across the way, talking at her door to a tall, sturdy youth. "There's Elihu Knott," said Sally. "Remember how we all used to play in the Lane together? When I meet Elihu now he acts as if he were affrighted of me. Gilly, I don't know how to begin. It's a most surprising story. I'm going into the country for a month or so, to take the place of Lady Pamela Vauclain at Cumnor Castle. What do you say to that?"

"I don't understand."

"Lady Pamela Vauclain has run away, and married Mr. Charles Tree. Her guardian-cousin, the Marquis of Romsey, who hasn't seen her since she was

a babe, hates Mr. Tree, and forbade her to wed him. The Marquis is coming home from Italy, and Mr. Tree and his bride want to gain a little time to protect some property and set matters straight. They want to have a Lady Pamela to welcome him; and I'm to be the lady."

Gilbert stared at his aunt through the dusk. "They must be mad, Sally! What could a girl of Pump Lane do with such gentry?"

"I'm to be well paid, Gilly, dear."

"But the risk, Sally! Think of that, when this Marquis finds you out! He might have you sent to gaol, or worse, for such a trick as that."

"No, I think not, Gilly. He would keep it secret. At first I thought as you did, when they spoke of it—until, well, until four gentlemen and a lady considered I couldn't do it, couldn't play the part of such a lady, wouldn't dare to front such a man. Then I felt I had to do it, Gilly, I had to do it! It wasn't in me to let them flout me so!"

Gilbert's face was more concerned than ever. "Oh, Sally, I'm terrible afraid of what may happen to you."

"I'm not," she answered stoutly. "When you think of it seriously it's no more of a risk than any woman's life at any playhouse. The Lady Pamela is a soft, gentle creature. No one would think of harming her; nor would they me."

"These nobles are wayward men, not like us simple

folk. I'm afraid of them, and hate them. What is this Marquis like?"

Sally hesitated. She looked through the window reflectively, the ghost of a smile on her lips. "He's been in Italy so long that they know very little of him," she answered vaguely.

Gilbert twisted his book about in his hands. He had something of his mother's gift of silence, which made his words the more weighty when he spoke. "I don't know much of the world, it's true," said he, "a clerk who spends the daytime over figures. But I know the gulf between Pump Lane and St. James's. You're a dear woman to us here, but there you're only a plaything, something to be toyed with, and thrown away at last. There are a dozen men here who want to wed you, Sally—honest men who work. There's Rob Sloane, the draper's clerk, and Stephen Tamworth. He may be apothecary himself some day. God knows I don't want you married yet, but I'd rather you were than take such a risk as you run."

"They are good men, Gilly, both Stephen and Rob; though none so good as you. But I can't take up with one of them, and live peaceful-like to-day nor to-morrow. I must have more, Gilly; I must see something more first. If I were tired or lonely I'd be glad of such a one to lean on; but I'm not. I'm young and strong, and I've an appetite. Oh, Gilly, it would be tragic to have such an appetite and starve with it!"

"The first tragedy was when Eve ate the apple."

"I wonder? I should have done the same as she, willy-nilly." Sally drew her chair nearer to Gilbert's, so near that she could put her hands on the book in his lap. Her eyes danced. "I like you serious, dear. It's a man's part to be so; but it's the dregs in the cup for a woman, after all the wine's drunk."

He gazed at her lovely face so near him, and he understood quite easily how it was she felt. His eyes, like those of a dumb, patient animal, were very tender. "I'm no priest, and even a crippled clerk can have his longings. You were made to live, Sally, and I can only pray God you come through it safely."

So they sat for a moment. Then Sally rose, went to the dresser, and lighted a candle. "I shall tell Kate," she said, "that I've got a part to play for a short time in the provinces. Only you know where I'm really going. When I come back I'll have fine tales to tell you of my lady."

"Cumnor's in Surrey, isn't it?" said Gilbert. "If you need help send for me, Sally. I'll make them treat you fair."

"Indeed, and I know you will."

Gilbert picked up the crutch that lay by his chair, for he was lame, got to his feet, and carried his book to a shelf beside the door. "It will be lonely here for a month," said he.

Sally put her hands on his shoulders as she kissed him. "The Lord keep you. I'll say that every evening. Good-night, dear."

With that she turned away, and went upstairs to bed.

Night settled over Pump Lane, and as it grew too dark to watch events from doorsteps and from windows the people went to bed, having no longer light enough to read the only book most of them knew. Rushlights flickered a little time and went out. Soon only the Bear and Staff in the court at the end of the Lane was alight, and the taproom there the only oasis in a desert of sleep.

In the west of London the Duchess of Devonshire gave a rout. While Pump Lane slumbered St. James's danced the quadrille, gambled at ecarté, laughed and flirted and supped. There went Sir John Gorham, Lord Verney, and the Earl of Dorset, and there the three met in a corner of the great gold dining-room and had their gossip over a bowl of punch. But they held their tongues discreetly when others drew near, and were silence itself so far as the ending of the episode in Vauxhall Gardens was concerned.

Meantime the real Lady Pamela and her Charles Tree had driven out of London to a little house at Kew that belonged to the bridegroom, and had contrived to forget that there were other people in the world than their two selves.

Far earlier than the ladies of Her Grace of Devonshire's rout rose Sally Temple the next morning. She threw wide her window and looked into the Lane. But

the Lane was up before her, and had, in fact, been stirring ever since dawn. Over the way William Kilgore was starting for his day's work on the river, and his good wife, skirts pinned above her ankles, was sweeping the dust of her front room into the street.

Sally set about her toilet. Although her wardrobe was small, it was choice. She had more taste than most of London's great ladies, and though she could not resist fixing one small black star beside the dimple that hovered in her cheek, she was content with one, and did not set a constellation as many ladies would. Her color was too fresh to toy with art, her own fingers tended her long locks as well as a hairdresser, her gown drew attention to her grace of figure rather than to itself. As she dressed she smiled and hummed a little tune. This day would she go forth and buy a few things for the Lady Pamela Vauclain.

When she went downstairs Gilbert was already gone to the office in Cheapside where he clerked all day. Kate was at the table; good, patient Kate, who had taken Sally into her widow's home when she was a child, and who looked upon her as a creature of far rarer value than herself. There were neighbors who said the widow Stanes had spoiled her sister. If she had she had found pleasure in it, and pleasure was not a thing to be declined. She gave Sally good-morning with a smile, and helped to serve her. "Gilly left a message for you," said she. "He said if you were going out of London to act you might need a

little money, and he'd a sovereign for you in his box upstairs."

"Good old Gilly! I am going out of London for a little time, but the manager gave me some money. That's part of the agreement, Kate." Sally blew the notion lightly away as if of small moment.

Later Sally went forth, Sir John Gorham's gold in the bag at her wrist. She traveled into the confines of that magic land where ladies bought their plumage, and she bargained shrewdly. It was a rare expedition, and one to be fully enjoyed. With the satisfaction of a huntsman after a keen day's sport she returned, and there she found a note waiting for her. The envelope was lavender, and it was sealed with a great red wafer. Sally retired to her room and opened it. "To Mistress Sally Temple," she read; "I think it likely you will miss society at Cumnor. You being used to town and its pleasures would be lonely in the empty country. I have a female relative who lives in Surrey, and I shall go down there now so that I may be near you. Do not fear. I will be within reach, and together we can keep dullness off. Will you not be kinder to me in the country? At least give me the chance to plead the cause I have so much at heart. You are the very paragon of lovely woman! From your unhappy servant, Verney."

Sally laughed. Then she read over the note in the romantic, high-flown manner in which she pictured

Lord Verney as reciting it. 'You are the very paragon of lovely woman!" she repeated. "So, I'll have two strings to my bow! Faith, and I'll have some pleasure with the two."

Then she fell to work lifting the laces and silks, the kerchiefs and the stockings from the bundles she had brought home. Presently she packed two boxes with her goods, ready for the journey on the morrow.

Late that afternoon a stout young man to whom a journey to Pump Lane always seemed as strange an experience as travels to the Indies, lifted the knocker that hung on the Stanes' door, and rapped. He always had the feeling that some hobgoblin might leap out at him, and so his relief was scarcely to be concealed when he found the door opened by the very person he sought.

The Earl of Dorset's face had been likened, by one of his many friends, to that of a good-natured, ruddy owl. He looked not unlike that now, as his eyes blinked before the sudden appearance of Sally. "Lord love us!" exclaimed she. "Who would have thought to find your lordship standing there? And such a feeble knocking! Indeed I thought likely it was old Adam come to beg for alms."

The Earl, though by no means brilliant, saw an opening for him. "It is Adam begging for alms," said he. "One of those smiles that dazzle us poor men so."

"And would you be content with that, my lord?"

Sally had to smile at him. "Then this young Adam is easier satisfied than the old one we hear tell of."

"A beggar must start meekly," said he. "I have had you in mind all day. I can't forget how you looked at me in the Gardens, how your eyes shone —"

"Come indoors, my lord. The Lane isn't used to such gestures."

The Earl stepped into the living-room, but would not sit, though Sally placed a chair for him. He felt more at ease standing up, where his thoughts and gestures were not cramped by the indolence of a chair.

"You were saying that my eyes shone," prompted Sally, mischievously.

"Egad, and so they did! I never admired a woman half so much. You could have done what you would with the three of us, and with Charles Tree too, I daresay. Do you hold to the plan on second thoughts?"

"Fie, my lord, did you think I would flinch?"

The Earl flushed apologetically, and stepped nearer. His voice dropped, and his eyes grew very eager.

"This is the matter, dear lady. You are used to town, to the theatre, to supping, to the Gardens, to Kew, and all the joys of London. In the country it will be lonely. I know how it is; I go there at times myself. It can be borne when there's hunting, but in the summer"—he gestured disapproval—"nothing

but flowers, and birds, a solitary canter, a stroll across the fields."

"And the milkmaids?" asked Sally.

"Dash the milkmaids! Country women always have big hands."

"La, what a pity!" said Sally, lifting her fingers to catch a lock of her hair.

"Nothing but out-of-doors, and a deuce too much of that! You would perish at Cumnor by yourself."

"You forget Lord Romsey."

"He!" The young man dismissed him with another gesture. "Most likely he'll live in the stables with the grooms." The Earl came still nearer. "I've a place not very far from Cumnor, Holker Hall. I'm going down day after to-morrow. Perhaps the time won't pass so heavily if we're together, perhaps you'll listen to me there."

"But the town is at its height, my lord, and you were never a hermit."

"I never had such a desire for loneliness before."

Dared by her shining eyes, the little Earl rose to a flight of eloquence. "Oh, Sally, I wish this were one of those Surrey lanes!" he exclaimed, and held out his arms beseechingly.

Sally drew back a step. "Don't ride too fast, my lord," she cautioned. "Remember I'm the Lady Pamela Vauclain, with a dragon to guard me."

"I shall disregard him."

Sally turned away and looked through the window.

"Men are such kittle-cattle, such weather-vanes," said she. "Only a fortnight since I heard it rumored you were to wed —"

"A base slander," protested the Earl.

Sally laughed. "The wind blows north, blows east, blows south. Well, sir, we shall see. If you go into the country, it is yourself decides. Don't tax me with it, pray."

"It's all of my own planning." Thereupon something of his habitual caution returned to the Earl. He knew that he should have a month with his charmer in more propitious places than Pump Lane. Some members of her family might appear at any moment, and he had no wish to encounter them. "It's agreed then. We'll meet again shortly," said he, "and under happy stars."

Sally's head bent demurely. "As you will," she answered.

She followed him to the door, and shut it after him. Then she ran to the window and watched him march down the Lane, as proud a cock of the walk as one could wish.

"Three strings to my bow," she murmured when he had disappeared, "Sir John, thinking himself very shrewd and cunning; this little Earl, simple as a school-boy, and my Lord Verney, strutting, flaming, hot-headed. With the three I shouldn't be lonely in the country. Heigh-ho! and each thinks he can marry me if he gets me alone there."

When Gilbert came home Sally was there to greet him, and she spent the short evening talking to him and Kate. She was up betimes next morning to bid him farewell, and she whispered in his ear as he left, "Don't be afraid for me, Gilly. I'll be back here with you before the moon's new again."

It was a radiant young woman who awaited Sir John at ten o'clock. The Lady Pamela at Kew would not have been disappointed in her substitute, but might have envied Sally's face and dress. "Lovely beyond compare!" exclaimed Sir John. "Oh, would I were a poet!" "Poets must be busy with their pens," objected Sally. "True," said he, "and my eyes have better use than drawing pothooks."

Sir John bade his servant convey Sally's boxes to the chariot that waited in the high street. Meantime Sally tied the strings of her cherry bonnet in a bow beneath her chin. To do that she had to look down, and Sir John, seeing they were alone, tried to kiss her. Her right hand stopped him short. "Fie, Sir John, is it so you'd treat the Lady Pamela Vauclain?"

"But Sally —" he protested.

"There is no Sally now," said she severely. "And if any foolish Jack comes this way looking for kisses he'll be straight sent about his business. Kisses are for milkmaids." And no patrician lady could have held him off with more disdain.

"Milkmaids! My word! I swear that several ladies —"

"No, Sir John. You may swear you have kissed all the Duchesses in the kingdom, but you may not treat the Lady Pamela so." Then, at sight of his discomfited face, she relented. "The Lady Pamela, Jack, is a quiet, cloistered girl. If I'm to play the part I must step carefully. You must see that for yourself."

The servant reported the boxes securely bestowed, and Sir John escorted his lady down the Lane. In the high street stood the chariot, a groom holding two sleek bays. Sir John handed the lady up, and climbed beside her. The groom sprang to his seat in the rumble.

Sir John was a noted whip, and he sent his bays through the crowded streets of lower London with high-bred disregard. Over the Thames they sped, and struck into the great road leading south.

The day was superfine, and the country sweet with June. Two hours' drive from London they stopped at the Lavender Bush, and there had luncheon in a private room. Then on southward through Surrey until the sun was sinking in the west, and the meadows were softening with the creeping shadows.

At last they sighted Cumnor, on a rise of ground. Its Tudor walls stood high, looking far over the circling park. Sir John turned at the gates, and drove upward. Presently he was handing Sally to the stepping-stone.

Doubtless she was frightened at the prospect; she

a girl of Pump Lane to be the châtelaine of such a mansion. But she did not show it, and laughed lightly as Sir John said, "Here you are at last, safely home again."

He had, as he had promised, seen to everything. He had letters to the housekeeper and steward, signed by the lady at Kew, and sealed with her signet. These bade them regard the newcomer as Lady Pamela Vauclain herself. Better than this, he had gold, and with it he speedily contrived to change the vision of every inmate of the house, of every dependent of Cumnor, so that they saw in Sally the only lady they had ever known. Thus it came about that they all were ready to declare that their Lady Pamela had never left Cumnor, but was dutifully awaiting the arrival of her guardian from oversea.

Sally went to bed a little frightened, though she told herself a hundred times that she had nothing to fear. Virtue, attended by beauty and wit, was surely amply guarded.

III

ROMSEY MEETS HIS WARD

UP rose the sun, and not long after, the new châtelaine of Cumnor wakened. From the high viewpoint of her bed she surveyed the room, a much larger and more elegantly furnished apartment than she had owned in Pump Lane. Three windows, placed closely together across from the bed, gave a large picture of trees, colored with the brilliant lights of early morning. And through an open casement came the song of a lark. Or was it a cuckoo? Or perhaps a thrush? Lady Pamela had no idea; but she was glad to hear it, for company's sake.

Against the walls of the room stood two wardrobes and two chests of drawers, each of them big enough to have been used as a fortress. Sally doubled her right arm under her head so that she might view them better. But the prospect was too tantalizing. Soon she had slipped out of bed, thrust her feet into slippers and her arms into a wadded silk dressing-gown, and was headed on a tour of exploration.

Picture Cortez coming upon an Aztec treasure-

house lined with pearls and emeralds, amethysts and opals, and a score of other dazzling gems. Then you may understand a little of this lady's feelings as she opened the wardrobes and pulled out the drawers of chests. She had a passion for fine raiment, and she had lived in Pump Lane all her life. She touched one garment after another, gossamer things of silk and lace and rare linen, and she thought how this would become her and how she would feel in that. For fully half an hour she tasted raiment like an epicure, and then she moved on to the dressing-table, laden with its armory for my lady's toilet, and to the cabinet that held rings and necklaces, jewels for the hair and girdles for the waist. She who was now Lady Pamela Tree had fled on the impulse of the moment, trusting to her lover to find her beautiful without the treasures that she left behind. The newcomer, fastening a necklet of gold about her throat as she stood before a mirror, wondered how the lady could have done it.

Her tour brought her to the three close-set windows, built into a thickness of the walls, beneath which stretched a cushioned seat. Sally knelt on this, and looked out. Below was a stone terrace, and beyond that a lawn, smooth as a green carpet. Her rooms were in the right wing, and to the left she saw the great avenue lined with beeches by which they had driven to Cumnor the night before. She caught glimpses of other lawns, broken with shrubbery, and

far to the right, beyond a hawthorn hedge, she spied the corner of a flower-garden.

It was quite a different view from the one she had from her window in Pump Lane. At first she liked it, letting her eyes move from the colors of the lawn to the trees and from the trees to the flowers. Then she wondered how she could endure having no one to watch and speculate upon. She would surely weary of hearing the larks in the morning, and gathering roses in the forenoon, and strolling on the lawns the rest of the day. She yawned, and thereupon she recrossed the room, shook off slippers and gown, and jumped back into bed.

She was dozing, when a light tap at the door waked her again. At her answer the door opened, and a woman, with a tray in her hand, entered.

"Good-morning, my lady, I hope you rested well," was the maid's greeting.

"What o'clock is it?"

"Eight, Lady Pamela. Will you have your chocolate now?"

The lady sat up, and thrust a pillow behind her back. "Of course I'll have my chocolate. Let me see. You're —"

"Rachel, my lady; Rachel Trumpet."

"Fetch me the tray, Rachel. But I've slept so well, and had such a scant bite last night, that I'm nearly famished. Are there herrings in the larder?"

Rachel looked doubtful. "There's fresh sole," said she.

"Very good, sole, and three or four strips of bacon, and some toast, and—" the lady considered, "and, Rachel, a little dish of sweets besides."

Rachel bobbed a curtsey, and hurried away.

Lady Pamela had a surprisingly good appetite that morning. Rachel, an observant, experienced tiring-maid of twenty years' service with gentility, could not recall ever having seen a lady so hungry. Nor a lady so vividly interested in her toilet. Her former mistress had sipped her morning chocolate almost negligently, and chosen her apparel quickly, but this one breakfasted with relish, and threw herself into the matter of attire with ardor. The result justified her, Rachel had to admit. As Lady Pamela stood completed, one arm raised to make certain of the security of her crown of red-gold hair, Rachel, on her knees, where she had been fixing the catch of a slipper-buckle, looked up at her. "I ask your pardon, my lady, but I never saw another as could wear such a yellow. But you might wear any color in the rainbow." She stood up, admiration writ large in her eyes.

"You think so?" Lady Pamela could scarcely refrain from bestowing a kiss on her maid. "Well, it's a pleasure just to please your eyes, though there be no men folk within twenty miles."

"His lordship is expected any time now," observed

Rachel. "Gregory says he may be here this very day."

"His lordship?" Lady Pamela shrugged her shoulders, and turned to the dressing-table. "I meant young men with eyes to their heads. Doubtless his lordship would prefer a monastery."

"Gregory says the Marquis will likely be the strangest nobleman in England," said Rachel, as she picked up the garments Lady Pamela had rejected. "He says—but there, I might offend my lady's ears."

Instantly the lady showed her curiosity. "Don't mind my feelings, Rachel. What did Gregory say?"

The maid put the clothes on a chair, and stood, her arms akimbo, looking at her mistress, while her round eyes and heightened color bore witness to her great interest in the subject.

"He says the Marquis has killed a dozen men in duels, that there's no one in Italy can better him in rapier-play, drunk or sober."

"Well, that's not so evil," said the lady.

"And that on a wager he broke into a nunnery, and carried off the handsomest woman, and entertained her at his castle for a week."

"And did she go back to the nunnery afterwards?"

"Gregory says she went to the court at Rome, and married a Prince."

"Then he did her a kindness," said Lady Pamela. "Come, Rachel, he's not so bad."

"But Gregory says the Marquis wouldn't be

brooked at all. If any man thwarted him the Marquis fought him, and if any woman, whether she were a Princess or a peasant, caught his eye, he hunted her. There was a goldsmith's daughter who was queen of the carnival at Florence. The Marquis saw her, and that night took her away with him—oh, it's a shocking story!" Rachel blushed.

"Shocking indeed!" said her mistress. "Does Gregory think the Marquis will fill Cumnor with ladies, and kill off all the men-folk?"

"Oh, Lady Pamela!" exclaimed Rachel. "If half the stories are true he must be a monster."

"No doubt he is. However, neither you nor I were brought up in a convent, Rachel." Lady Pamela went to the window and looked out at the lawn. "Where are his rooms in Cumnor?"

"In the east wing, my lady, the old part. It's a good walk from here."

"So much the better." The lady shrugged her shoulders. "I mean to forget all about him. Men are only dangerous when we think too much of them."

Lady Pamela spent the morning in learning something about Cumnor. She cared nothing for its history, which was long and varied, the castle having a Norman keep at one end of its Tudor walls. She looked through her own apartments; the sitting-room, with its fine view to the west; the cabinet, or writing room, with a few shelves of books; the gallery, where a lady might walk in inclement weather. Then

she proceeded to the main portion, the great hall, semi-barbaric in dimensions, with its hearth, large enough for three to sit abreast on either side; the dining-room, paneled in oak, with a small musicians' gallery at the farther end; the armory, its walls hidden under shields and weapons of every age in England's history; the portrait gallery, hung with canvases of marquises and marchionesses of Romsey, the subjects of Van Dyke, and Lely, and Kneller, and finally the chapel, built when there had been a Bishop of the Roman Church numbered in the family, but now relegated to an occasional service by the village curate.

Lady Pamela passed through these glories almost heedlessly. What had she, a child of to-day, to do with the monuments of yesterday? Why should she stop before a lean-faced gentleman with a hook nose, a hawk eye, and a scar on his right cheek, because he was painted by Sir Godfrey Kneller, or even, forsooth, because he had won the name of "Butcher of Romsey" in Ireland in the days when William reigned? She did not stop until she reached the oak door that led from the great hall to the apartments in the eastern wing. There she faced about and hurried over the rugs to the entrance, and betook herself out of doors.

Cumnor's head-gardener found the new Lady Pamela eager to learn about flowers. It was surprising, he thought, considering how much the lady

evidently loved them, how little she knew of them. But he judged that she would quickly learn. She picked two large yellow rosebuds for her gown, and she asked him to send as many like them as he could spare to her chamber every morning.

The groom of the stables was amazed to see Lady Pamela bearing down upon his precincts. He shared the feelings of the gardener. Her ladyship knew very little of horses, but it seemed she loved them. She praised their color and their sleekness, overlooking his professional comments. Then she went on to the kennels, and there she reveled, for she had known almost all breeds of dogs in Pump Lane.

The admirable Gregory, who waited on her ladyship at dinner, found his mistress most inquisitive. She wanted to know about all the families in the neighborhood, about the curate, if he were young and good-looking, about the village, about the servants, even about himself. Yet she did full justice to the cooking. "My compliments to cook," she said as she finished, "and tell her I've never known tripe to taste so fine. I'll have to take a lesson from her some day." All which Gregory later reported to the servants' hall, adding materially to the stock of information Rachel had earlier provided.

The afternoon was sultry, and Lady Pamela spent it on the terrace, trying to beguile herself with a bit of embroidery. But she had never been very fond of the needle, using it only when she was obliged to, and

soon she was yawning, and then nodding, and in between times yearning for town and her own kind. Presently she went up to her rooms and planned another toilette. She was not to be defrauded of this pleasure, even if there were no one to see her. This time she chose white, without any ornaments except one of the yellow rosebuds fastened at her breast. So, later, she had supper, and then sat in a chair at a window of the great hall, watching the stars being lighted in the darkening sky, and thinking what a poor exchange they were for the houses over the way.

It was full night when Lady Pamela heard the sound of wheels on the driveway outside. She peered a little closer through the window, but the starlight only showed her a heavy chaise and two horses. Then she heard steps, and shortly after the door of the hall, which had been left slightly open, swung wide. A man came into the hall, or rather strode in, for he had all the assurance of an owner.

Lady Pamela's gown rustled as she turned in her chair, and instantly the stranger's eyes were bent upon her. He appeared to her to be very tall, although a slenderness of body might have had something to do with that impression. In spite of the June air he wore a cloak, of dull brown, over his dark clothes, and a broad-brimmed, russet-colored hat. When he removed the latter, Lady Pamela saw a face of Southern coloring, deep-set eyes, and black hair that was not dressed according to the fashion.

"Who are you?" the man asked in a voice that, although low-pitched, seemed to carry a great distance.

She almost answered "Sally Temple;" but contrived to murmur, "Pamela Vauclain."

"My cousin, then," stated the stranger abruptly; and he stepped to her chair, lifted her right hand, and touched it with his cold lips. "I'm Romsey. And I'm glad to see you, Pamela; though there's little else I'm glad of in this foggy country." He turned away, and flung his hat and cloak on a chair. "Hola!" he shouted. "Service here, lights, fire, coals!"

His voice echoed in the great hall, and almost immediately the servants came running. One touched a lighted taper to the candles in their sconces on the walls, another fired the hearth logs, a third closed the great hall door, a fourth picked up the nobleman's hat and cloak, and Gregory, the major-domo, stood before the new arrival and asked what his lordship would have for supper.

"I've supped," said Romsey, "and I've drunk sufficient of your reeking English claret. Fetch me port wine to that seat by the fire."

The servants scattered, and Romsey walked over to the arm-chair he had chosen. The hall was well lighted now, and the lady could see why men called the Marquis black. His hair was raven, his complexion dark, he wore a black moustache on his upper lip, a

little tuft of black in the center of his lower lip, and, save for his neckerchief, all his costume was somber.

He sat down with his back half toward her, and his profile, angular, and positive in outline, was hers to scan. That was all he seemed likely to give her, for after Gregory had brought the port wine and set it on a table by the arm-chair, the Marquis sat silent while he drank three glasses. She found herself growing almost afraid to have him speak.

Presently, without turning his head, he swung out his arm, as if he knew she must be watching for his orders. "Come over here," he said, "and sit on that stool where I can look at you."

The girl was not used to commands, except such as she heard at Drury Lane Theatre, and there they were given for the good of a common cause. She hesitated; but eventually she went over to the stool between Romsey and the hearth, and sat down.

She took the yellow rosebud from her gown and began playing with it. Meantime she knew the man's eyes were resting on her, and she felt the blood sweep into her face. She pulled a petal from the rose and dropped it on the floor, then another; then she looked up at him. The black depths of his eyes seemed to glow at her.

"You're the first good-looking thing I've seen in England," he stated. He did not smile, and she, with a sudden quickening of breath, looked down at the rosebud again. "In Italy women wear their hair

bound tight. I like your way better. You must be twenty years old?"

"Yes," she answered truthfully.

Then for some time one petal after another fell to the floor while he was silent.

"What do you know of me, cousin?" he asked presently.

"Nothing."

"And you care less?"

She was silent.

"Why should you care?" he considered aloud. "A man who is only a name here, who prefers Italy to England, who has very little regard for his own order, or for the matter of that, for anyone or anything."

"You must be very melancholy, my lord;" she glanced up at him; "unless you care for people."

He might not have heard her, to judge from his look, although his eyes were bent upon her. "You are religiously inclined, cousin?" he asked after a pause.

She shook her head.

"Women are either religious, or made to plague men," he declared.

"I am neither," she answered.

"What of Charles Tree? He hasn't been mentioned in your letters lately."

The girl smiled at the fire. "We meet very rarely nowadays," said she.

The stillness grew oppressive. Pamela kept her eyes on the fire, a spell seeming to have settled on her. She wanted to move, to get up from the stool, which was uncomfortable, and find another seat. But she felt as if she were bound where she was, dominated by something in this brooding man, who was so different from any she had known.

A log broke, and, as if respited by the sudden sound, she turned her head toward the Marquis. He was not looking at her. Chin on hand, he was staring into the fire. She imagined that there were fitful devils in his dark eyes.

"At Raconti in Tuscany I saw few women," he said, half to himself, half to her. "I had my fill of them when I went to the Grand Duke's court at Florence one month in the year. I hunted in the mountains, bears and boars and such; not the pheasants these fine English shoot."

"You should go to town, my lord. You can find plenty of sport of every kind there," she said, thinking to rally him.

"Town? London? A place of smug-faced hypocrites and pirouetting fools! What would I do with such people?"

"You could choose a wife there."

He looked at her, and for the first time his lips parted in a smile. "A wife? And so have a woman always by me! No, cousin, I am likely to find my one ward here quite enough."

She jumped up from the stool, her face suddenly hot with anger. "You'll not find me in the way, I can assure you of that!" she cried. "You need never know there's a woman near you. Live any way you please."

His eyes lighted, though he did not move from his half-reclining posture. "On my word, Pamela, you have some spirit! You're better-looking mad than quiet."

She stood straight, though his words and manner made her quiver. "In England women are more than men's playthings," she said hotly.

"Ah, that's the trouble with England." He laughed, a trifle scornfully. "But no man of my family ever agreed with your view."

"Then it's high time some one forced it on you."

His eyes, really gleaming now, took in her hostile attitude and face. "I was right. I like you better angry," he declared.

His absolute insolence maddened her. "And I do not like you in any way!" said she. "You are cold and bitter and selfish. You make me think of a miser fingering his gold. You would do better to stay abroad."

The firelight shone behind her, setting off her white gown, her flushed cheeks, her angry eyes, her glowing hair. The Marquis stirred in his chair, sat up straighter, and then got to his feet. He stood before her, seeming to tower above her menacingly.

"Tell me that you hate me," he commanded, his voice low and clear.

She knew that some evil thought was in him; she knew that he was both daring and threatening her; but she could no longer hold herself in check. Looking him fairly in the face she answered, "Very well. I do hate you, then!"

Instantly he caught her hands, and in spite of her struggles, drew her close to him. "This is a real welcome home!" he cried, and kissed her lips.

She tore herself free and sprang back, her face, that had been afire, now white with anger. "Coward!" she cried. "To take me all alone!"

He was calm again, except for the gleam in his eyes. "I give you warning, Pamela. Hadn't you better leave me while there's time?"

She stood her ground an instant, quivering with rage. "They told ill tales about you," she said, "and I thought them merely gossip. Now I do believe them, all of them! You are a monster. But I'd have you know that I'm not one of your Italian dolls, but an English woman. I can take care of myself!" Her eyes met his evenly for a moment. Then she turned, and walking to the door of the west wing, opened it, and hurrying through shut it behind her. She stood back of it, unnerved with her anger. After a moment the stillness calmed her, and she went up the stairs to her own rooms, defiance of Cumnor and its master in her face.

IV

THE MASTERFUL MAN AT HOME

THE Lady Pamela from Pump Lane was unquestionably high-spirited and brave, or she would never have agreed to go to Cumnor. Moreover, quite a portion of her time since she had turned sixteen had been devoted to putting young men in their proper places, for young men were by nature presuming, though rather less so in Cheapside than in St. James's, and she had very early acquired the art of repulsing them without wounding their vanity too greatly. She was, perhaps, as talented an artist at this game of fence as she was an actress. She realized at once, however, that this new man from Italy was quite different from any she had known before.

It would not be hard to state her opinion of Richard Tressillian Vauclain, fifth Marquis of Romsey. She judged that his heart and soul were as black as his hair and eyes. She had not the slightest doubt that he had used men and women for his own evil ends in that savage Italy of his. There had been nothing tentative in his grasp of her hands, nothing concilia-

tory in his eyes. It had mattered nothing to him that she was his ward and cousin, nothing that he was an English nobleman and this the civilized year of 1770. He was a law to himself, and such autocrats had hitherto been beyond her ken.

The lady from Pump Lane, her eyes unusually bright with anger, got herself to bed, but not to sleep. She had a sudden intense longing for home, for the certainty that faithful Kate and watchful Gilly were under the same roof with her, that simple, common folk were asleep in houses next her own and across the way. She trusted town as she distrusted the country. She felt that perhaps she had put herself into perils she did not understand, and it took all her pride to keep her from planning to escape from them as quickly as she could.

The sun returned to Surrey, and at last awakened the new lady, who had slept in spite of herself. The great four-post bed was very soft, and a breeze fluttered the curtains at the windows. She felt rested and strong. She found that she could even smile at the thought of what had happened in the hall the night before. The Marquis might be very tall and dark, very evil-hearted, but he was only a man, and she had never feared a man yet. Besides, she was his cousin, and a lady, and it was clear that all she had to do was to keep him at a proper distance. Spirited as ever, she pulled the bell-rope beside the bed for Rachel, and prepared to indulge her taste in dress.

She kept to herself all morning, and dined in her sitting-room. She decided that Lord Romsey could live in his wing of Cumnor, and she in hers. He might busy himself with his own affairs, might shoot the small game that he so much despised, and ride the wildest horse in the stables and break his neck. She pictured him brought in thus, and how she would tend him, and the thought fetched a smile to her lips. She looked down admiringly at her taffeta gown, embroidered with tiny rosebuds, and fingered the chain of seed-pearls she had woven into her hair. Such a beautiful costume would give even a timid woman courage, she considered, and she thought she would like to see him dare to touch her now.

In the late afternoon she went down to the terrace, and was sunning herself there, when Romsey appeared from the kennels. She did not waver, but turned her eyes indolently toward him, drooping the lids a little. She noted that he bore himself well, and that his glance at her was quick and straight.

"You rested well, cousin?" he asked. "You must have, to judge by your looks."

"I always sleep well," she answered calmly.

"And didn't need your guardian in the house to make you feel more secure?" he suggested.

She shook her head as if she had no interest in the notion. "You find Cumnor in good order?" she inquired, in turn.

"Enough so; if you mean sleek and fat. I find it

like all England, a great country fair, stupid, slow, the cattle overfed, the tenants lazy."

"And you'll stir them up?"

"I'd like to make them sweat."

"How glad they'll be to have you back, my lord."

"Call me Richard, cousin."

The lady raised her fan to hide a yawn. "What spirit you have, to be sure, sir! We should all enjoy watching your performance."

Romsey stood looking at her broodingly. In a crowd one would have noted his face in a thousand. You might have gone through the Van Dykes, the Lelys and the Knellers in the great gallery, and found a little of him here and a little there, but nothing that approached a counterpart. His olive skin, that at night made him look so dark, was inherited from his mother, and was most un-English. His face was both commanding and passionate, as if he had been spoiled by his own will in youth, and had later vainly tried to curb his nature. His deep, searching eyes, and determined mouth gave evidence of this, and might have caused one familiar with his history to remember that occasionally the tyrants of Italian cities had taken to the hermit's life in the desert and a shirt of hair.

The girl began to hum a little tune. She was evidently as placid as the golden afternoon, and showing that nothing could disturb her deep content in Cumnor.

Romsey stepped to a wooden bench that stood by a path near the terrace, wrenched it from its foothold in the earth, and set it down close to his ward. He took his seat there. "Do you know," said he abruptly, "that we two are the only ones of the clan in England? That should draw us together."

"It's a loose bond, my lord."

"Richard," he corrected her.

"Since you seem to set such store on the name—Richard," she said, as if flinging him a farthing.

"Egad, you do seem to hate me! Yet I came here on purpose to be a guardian and master to you."

Lady Pamela laughed, not unkindly, but with great amusement. "Girls are so fond of masters. In town it's said that's the cause they marry." She looked at him critically. "You should go up to London, Richard; take a whip, and choose a slave or two. There's many women would like it."

"I take it, Pamela," he went on, unminding her irony, "that you're wiser than you look. In Italy it's the other way about. But you pretend to know your London, and something of men and women. How did you come by it?"

"Oh, I've had a little experience."

"You've been to town?"

She nodded over her fan.

"With whom?"

"I went on a visit to the Bishop's daughter."

"You've been to routs and drums?"

"A few of them. I love to dance."

"You've known men in love? Besides Charles Tree?"

Again she nodded. "So they said. But to tell you truly, they do it better on the stage."

"You've been to the play, then?"

"Why, so I have. To Drury Lane. Oh, how I love play-acting!"

"So, while I thought of you as a country mouse you were really a woman of fashion! Half the people in town know Lady Pamela Vauclain?"

"Half the fashion know *me*. I'm told I've been toasted once or twice at Brooks's." She turned, and flashed a smile upon him. "Do you blame them so monstrous much, Richard?"

"Egad, no!" he exclaimed, the faintest twinkle in his eyes. "For an English woman—no, I don't blame them much."

She saw her advantage; but she checked her hand. "You're not so very gallant, Richard, are you?" she said, turning away. "But it's scarcely necessary between cousins."

The Marquis sat back on his bench, frowning. He was beginning to understand why it was that Englishmen were reputed to have so much trouble in managing their households.

"You speak the truth in that," he declared; and the girl recognized again the low clearness of his voice as she had heard it the night before. "We are

cousins, and I am some ten years your elder. There should be no disputes between us."

She quite forgot her calm manner, and clapped her hands impatiently. "Good lack, you talk as if I were the scullery-maid!"

Romsey's attention, however, was at that moment diverted down the driveway to the avenue of beeches. "Who comes here?" he exclaimed. "The fat Wife of Bath, clad in breeches, and astride her palfry!"

Lady Pamela looked. There was a horseman in the avenue sure enough, and he sat rather heavily in his saddle, and appeared fatter than was becoming in a rider. His horse, also, was certainly no Barbary steed.

"It's the Earl of Dorset," she explained, "a neighbor, and a very pleasant gentleman."

"What, not the stout Wife of Bath? An Earl! Oh, fat and sluggish country!"

"Not so loud, if you please," she begged; and then added, "He looks much better on his own feet."

The noble Earl, quite unconscious of their comments, was beaming as he rode up. He swept off his hat, and as soon as he reached the steps that led to the terrace, swung himself down to the ground. His horse, a well-trained beast, stood stock-still.

Lady Pamela rose, smiling a welcome at the young man as he approached her. "I was sure," she said, "that you would be among the first to welcome my cousin when he came home." Standing half-way be-

tween the two, she waved the men together with a flourish of her fan. "Cousin Richard, my friend the Earl of Dorset."

The stout guest blinked his owlish eyes, and nodded cheerily. "I bid you welcome home, Lord Romsey," said he, politely.

The Marquis stood with his arms folded, and tipped his head a trifle as if his neck was very stiff.

Lady Pamela went to the hall door and called a servant. When the footman answered; "A chair for this gentleman," said she, "and take his horse to the stable."

The little Earl, refreshed by a sight of the lady he sought, and therefore disposed to be pleased with everything, sat down near his hostess. Romsey, his manner utterly indifferent, lounged on his bench. Lady Pamela opened her fan again, and looked engagingly at the shorter man. "The last time we met I remember you spoke of turning hermit in the country."

"So I did; I remember, so I did," he agreed eagerly.

"Hermits are commonly supposed to fast," put in Romsey.

The Earl blinked.

"Why, the saints are all rosy, comely men in the pictures," said the girl, quickly.

The comedy of three proceeded, played in this manner: Pamela, like a skilful angler, would dangle a question like bait before the Earl; he, eager to

shine, would bite, making some fond and fatuous remark; Romsey would straightway spear him mercilessly, and the lady would have to disengage the barb as tactfully as she could. Time and again the Earl flushed, and blinked rapidly at some attack of the man from Italy, and each time Pamela caught his eye and soothed his anger with a sympathetic smile. "We must ride together some morning," she said to the Earl. "What, on two mincing palfreys like that piebald one!" Romsey exclaimed. The Earl glowered. "Why, if our Cumnor stables can't provide me a proper beast, I'd be glad to beg the loan of a mare from Lord Dorset," the girl responded promptly.

"I have a whole stable at your service," said the Earl, mollified again.

When, however, Pamela and the Earl fell to talking of people in London the Marquis drew into his shell. The girl gradually turned her shoulder more and more positively upon him, and shut him out of their conversation. Once, glancing sideways in his direction, she said, "This must weary you, cousin; pray don't stay here if it does. Lord Dorset and I can entertain each other."

"I'm much enlightened," he answered shortly; but as if to belie his words he crossed his long legs impatiently, and scowled at the distant trees.

Romsey was still brooding when the Earl rose, as if intending to take his leave. "Surely you will stay to sup with us?" Pamela said invitingly. The Earl

looked at the other man. "It would be a pleasure to have you," urged the girl. "Indeed," began the guest, and hesitated, divided between desire and apprehension of his host. Plainly he did not foresee very enjoyable entertainment at a table headed by the Marquis. "If Lord Romsey —"

The Marquis appeared to be quite absorbed, now gazing at the sky.

"He wishes you to stay," said Pamela, forced to speak for him. "Don't you, cousin?" she added, turning on him.

"You take the words from my mouth," he answered, leaving his meaning vague.

Pamela snapped her little ivory fan shut. "Bid our guest stay, my lord," she commanded. "You know you'll be glad of his society." She rapped the fan impatiently against the back of her hand.

Romsey looked up, and their eyes met. For the first time his glance was defensive, and seemed to take account of the will in hers. As if he were caught at some disadvantage seated, he stood up quickly. But she stuck to her ground, facing him, with her hands tightly closed. "You will bid him stay," she repeated.

"I bid you stay," he said, the flicker of a smile in his eyes.

The girl actually laughed with pleasure, resting her left hand on the back of her chair. "There's such a difference between your Italian and our English

ways," she said with animation. "Come indoors, Lord Dorset."

The Earl accompanied her across the terrace, not altogether satisfied. In the hall Pamela happened to drop her fan, and he picked it up. "Why, it's cracked," he said, examining it, "the ivory's split apart." She laughed again as she took it from him. "So it is, poor thing. I must have snapped it in my fingers." She did not want to tell him that she had broken it when she crossed wills with Romsey.

The supper party of three was a lively affair that night. To begin with, Pamela had a chance to make another toilette, and she appeared ultimately in a white-and-silver gown, her hair dressed in a manner she had contrived in Pump Lane, but had never dared to wear there, in a soft wave, low across her forehead. A small black star set off the cream of her complexion, and nothing could have been more radiant than her eyes, which put all other lights in the dining-room to shame.

The Earl, gradually reassured as he weathered Romsey's temper, and thinking that the latter had now been set in his proper place, was ravished by his first sight of the charming lady and felt certain that the world held no beauty comparable to hers. With his first glass of the famous Cumnor Burgundy he resolved to besiege her as persistently as the Greeks beset the walls of Troy, with his second glass he was chuckling to think how the Pump Lane lassie was

hoodwinking this uncouth Marquis, and at the third he began to laugh at the march he had stolen on Lord Verney and Sir John Gorham. Meanwhile Pamela fed him attention and compliments as a mistress might offer choice morsels to a pet dog.

The Marquis sat in his high-backed chair, and kept Gregory busy filling his glass of wine. His eyes were almost constantly upon his ward across the table, and gradually some of her sparkle seemed to steal into his somberness. When the supper was half over he began to talk, and although Pamela had intended to control the situation, she found herself obliged to drop the reins into his hands. His fingers twisted the long stem of his wine-glass, as he told them tales of Italy. Wild, improbable tales they were, but they became truthful by his manner of telling them; stories of lurid passion in lonely castles, of women's perfidy and men's revenge, of horrors done in dungeons, and of villainies that stalked the hills and plains. He himself had fought *condottieri* chiefs, he had ridden through Pescara when the bells were mute, and fear of the black-pox written on every face; he had sat across the table from Urbino's Duke when the latter dropped poison from his ring into the wine-glass of his Cardinal guest. "He twisted his glass so—as I do now," said Romsey, "and his eyes traveled around the table until they came to the Cardinal's face, and then he raised his own glass, and smiled over it as the Cardinal drank."

The little Earl, less rosy than usual, choked over a sip of the Burgundy, and tried vainly to smile. Pamela never moved; her eyes were intent on Romsey's face

"Quick poison it was," said Romsey, as if enjoying the thought. "Urbino knew his trade. But he forgot, and forgave his wife afterwards. Half a year later he repented of it."

"You mean—" murmured Pamela.

"I mean the man who forgives is a fool. Urbino died because of his charity."

"What horrors!" exclaimed Pamela. "Are such things really true?"

Romsey's lips broke into a smile. "I have no skill at inventing stories. What I say is so."

His tales lost nothing by his manner of telling them, which was full of dramatic pauses and half-veiled innuendos. Perhaps his audience's attention urged him on. The Earl, his face now looking almost pale in the candleshine, sunk back in his chair, had the air of being ready to start to his feet should anyone speak suddenly behind him. Pamela's eyes bore witness to a wide range of emotions, amazement, incredulity, appreciation of Romsey's dramatic power, and an intense interest in all that he had to say.

Romsey stopped abruptly, seeming to imply that although he had not by any means come to the end of his histories, he had told enough for them to hear.

Pamela rose quickly to break the spell he had cast upon them. "We need a little cooler air," she said; and led the way through the hall to the terrace.

The night was deep with stars. A breeze from the west soothed their warm faces. The Earl, impressed by Romsey's stories, and feeling unnaturally subdued, realizing also that he would have little chance to besiege the lady that evening, said good-night, and calling for his horse, rode away.

When he had gone the girl from Pump Lane raised her arms, and drew in a deep breath. She was thinking of Gilbert Stanes, and of the great distance that lay between his little sitting-room and this vast park of Cumnor.

When she turned she found Romsey standing near her. He was staring at a star that hung just above the tallest beech, and a certain moodiness in his face caught her attention.

"You haven't known many happy people, have you?" she said, on impulse.

"Happy people?" he echoed questioningly; and looked at her. "Who are happy?"

"I never thought much about it before," she answered, "but I suppose those who care for other people. Those men and women you knew in Italy were always nursing their own passions, and the Church people their own souls."

"And what else could they do?"

"Care about other people."

He was still gazing at her. "Are there such people anywhere?" he asked.

Again she spoke on impulse. "I know one or two. Oh, far from here, very far from us."

He stared a moment. "Yes, I believe there are such people," he said. "I've seen them in the crowded streets of towns. But they're not of our race, Pamela."

She looked again at the star-strewn sky, and presently she sighed. "It's hard to be like them," she murmured. "It's so much easier to want things for oneself."

"And take what you want," he said brusquely. "Seize it before it slips away."

The words slid by her, as she communed with her thoughts. After a while she turned. "Good-night. I hope no ghosts will spoil your sleep."

He looked cold and distant. "I'm used to dealing with ghosts," he returned shortly.

In the shelter of her own room Pamela sank on the seat beneath the windows. She was homesick for her own people, for those who loved each other, and found contentment in that, having no knowledge of the evil passions that had loomed so large in the stories Romsey had told them at the supper-table.

V

THE LADY HEARS COMMANDS

LORD ROMSEY'S blackness was occasionally streaked with a shade or two of gray—as when he had stood under the stars and listened to Pamela's comments—but for the most part it was of a consistent color. He was as imperious as any Roman Emperor. Gilbert Stanes had once told his young aunt the story of King Canute's forbidding the waves to advance, and she had dared to doubt it. But as she grew more familiar with the Marquis of Romsey she relinquished her doubt in that story. There were such men to be found. Romsey was such a man; she had no doubt but that from his rock of Cumnor he would have the audacity—if the notion had pleased him—to forbid the fields of grain to ripen, or the orchards to bear fruit.

The girl concluded that the man lived in a cloak, with the collar usually standing. He was generally aloof and remote, rarely condescending to meet other people on their own grounds, or even on a neutral field, but surveying them from the heights of his superiority. If he ever realized that others differed

from his views, he would not admit the justice of their divergence. It seemed as if he had modeled himself on the pattern of a tyrant, having apparently studied all types of men, and decided that the part of tyrant suited him best.

Occasionally he flung the folds of his cloak behind him and stood forth. Then there was intense purpose in his eyes and face. At such times the girl from Pump Lane realized that he was startlingly human, but in a manner she did not understand. These glimpses, however, convinced her that under the surface he was indeed like those avid, passionate creatures he had lived among in Italy, who tore at their joy, howled at the wind, seized at delight as it fled before them, fearful lest it should leave them with empty hands. The thought of such people disturbed her, in spite of her homely breeding and native sense, and she tried to put it from her mind. But her convictions were right, for Romsey had lived entirely for pleasure, like the men and women he had been thrown among.

The girl contrived to see him only infrequently, and busied herself in the gardens, in walks through the park, and in learning what she could concerning the ordering of the household from the housekeeper. Many a time she asked Rachel to stay in her sitting-room, and chatted with her of small matters. She made friends with the lodge-keeper's children, and played with them for long hours in the sun. Through

them she learned something of the tenants, and went to see those who were ill. But as each day passed she found the rôle of a great lady grow more lonely, and longed more for the bustle of life in Cheapside.

Romsey, however, soon began to insist on seeing something of her. When she had taken her meals in her rooms for three days he sent word by Gregory that he wished her presence in the dining-hall, and though she rebelled at the message she decided it would be wisest not to refuse him. Sometimes he met her on her walks, sometimes in the gardens, and she had the feeling that he was going out of his way to find her. Usually when they met he treated her in the same manner, was arrogant and imperious, sarcastic, sharp-tongued, as if he were testing her, and only very infrequently agreed with her. What she liked he usually seemed to despise. He called the Earl of Dorset "that pink-faced fool," and asked if all the gentlemen in London had mushrooms for brains. When she made some defense of her friend, he smiled. "Come, Pamela, admit that the men are a sorry lot in England," he said. "You cannot grow good fruit from a worn-out tree."

She tossed her head indignantly. "There are Englishmen who would challenge you for that."

His smile broadened. "Not the men; the English women might, Pam. The men would prefer to talk."

They were in the garden at the time; and just at that point Sir John Gorham rode up, and reined in

on the other side of the wall that sheltered the hollyhocks and larkspurs. Pamela gave a sigh of relief, for Sir John seemed to bring a breath of London to her.

"Why, it's Lord Fantastico himself!" exclaimed Romsey, seeing the newcomer.

Pamela, her pretty face all smiles, stood on tiptoe, and waved a hand to Sir John. He rose in his stirrups, for the wall was high. "Good-morning, my lady," said he, gaily, "and the same to you, Lord Romsey, for I'm sure you must be he."

Stooping, Pamela broke a red rose, and flung it over the wall, and Sir John, at the peril of his neck, reached, and caught it.

"Child's play," muttered Romsey.

"Let the children play, then!" she threw at him over her shoulder.

As eagerly as a school-girl on a holiday, she ran around the garden wall, and holding out her hands to Sir John, "Jack, will you take me riding?" she begged.

"Will I?" he cried delightedly, and added in a lower voice, "How goes it, Lady Pam?"

She shook her head, murmuring, "Monstrous bad!"

Sir John slid from his saddle. "Leave him to me," he whispered, "I'll handle him properly. And first let me stable my nag."

Pamela and Sir John, leading his horse, walked to the stables, deserting Romsey in the garden.

"Oh, Jack," cried Pamela, "it's such a lovely place, with such perfect flowers, and such a quantity of sweet gowns and trinkets in my rooms; and yet I am miserable!"

"I'll right that!" said the confident gallant. "I'll show the monster his place."

"Oh, I'm so glad you came!" she exclaimed.

"Then you do like me a little?"

"I like you oceans-full," she said, beaming.

Sir John gave his horse to a groom, and they walked back to the house. On the way he stopped, as if remembering something. "See; here's my gift," he said, and took from an inside pocket a satin case, and put it in Pamela's hands.

With sparkling eyes she opened the little box, and found a necklet of pearls. "Oh, you dear Jack!" she cried; "what a beauty! But they're far too fine for me!"

"Nothing's too fine that will soften the heart of beauty. I hope they'll plead for me."

"Indeed, and they are eloquent," she said, dangling the chain on her hand.

Sir John was not like the Earl of Dorset, and so, when he returned to the lawn, and found Romsey standing there, like a stranded ship on the rocks, he valiantly prepared to disarm him. "Egad, sir, and I'm glad to set eyes on you!" he said, heartily. "They've talked so much of you in London that you're grown into the eighth wonder of the world."

Romsey frowned. "You have the advantage of me. I've not heard talk of you."

"No, I'm a modest person. John Gorham is my name, and I have the honor of being an old friend of Lady Pam." He struck his boot with his riding-crop. "My word, you almost made me forget my bit of scandal; one of the choicest, too! The Countess of Kew has run away with Hawkins, the prize-fighter!"

"What did I say?" growled Romsey, looking at Pamela. "The gentlemen of England are all sheep."

"Did you say that?" cried Sir John, apparently very much delighted. "I quite agree with you, my lord. They are all sheep, or goats. Now, Hawkins is a fine red-blooded rascal! I saw him whip the Manx Giant. There was a battle! One eye closed, nose broken, hammered to a jelly—"

"Oh, stop, Jack, stop!" cried the girl.

"How you would have enjoyed it, Romsey!" said Sir John, stepping nearer to him, and smiling broadly. "I see we're much alike. Blood and brawn! No small-sword work, no wrestling on the green; beef and muscle and bone till one or the other cracks!" And he struck the Marquis a clap on the shoulder.

"How, sir!" exclaimed Romsey, as if he did not relish the other's words or actions.

"Call me Jack. I bow to the Countess of Kew and her battling Hawkins. It's not a scandal, it's an epic poem! Will dinner soon be ready, Pam? I have an

appetite like that rogue they act at Drury Lane; what's his name? Brave Jack Falstaff!"

Sir John fairly swept the other two along with his tempest of good humor, and landed them all in their seats at the dinner-table.

All through dinner he held the upper hand. When Romsey told of some adventure in Italy Sir John had a wilder tale of distant Scotland, Cornwall, or Wales. When Romsey scoffed at anything English Sir John scoffed twice as volubly and many times more loudly. To Pamela, who knew Sir John as a man famed for his suavity and even-temper, the spectacle was delicious. To her delight she saw Romsey congeal, beaten at his own tricks, and finally sit distant and silent, disdain on his lips and in his eyes.

Where the simple Earl of Dorset had been crushed at table Sir John rose supreme. The hock from Cumnor's cellars was no more translucent than his wit. He told gossip of London with all the skill of "The Tatler." He even spoke of Charles Tree, who, he said, was reported to be in Paris, gaming away his patrimony to solace him for a recent loss in love. With an innocent face he asked Romsey if he had heard of the actress, Sally Temple, and without waiting for his answer, extolled her as the prettiest woman in town. "And it's a fact," he added, "that she is as good as she is beautiful. Wouldn't you like to see her, my lord?"

Here Pamela interrupted. "It isn't seemly I

should hear you discuss such matters," said she. "Why should my cousin care about Sally Temple?"

"I'll warrant she's no worse than many a lady," said Romsey, coldly. "I've found that there's more virtue at present among the people than among the peerage."

Sir John burst out laughing. Lady Pamela, somewhat flushed, looked at Romsey inquiringly.

"But even a peasant wife I'd keep under lock and key," added the latter, dourly.

"Oh, my lord, how you will spoil everything!" cried Pamela, disconcerted.

Again Sir John laughed. The girl shot an angry glance at him; but immediately, as if she found it hard to stay angry, she laughed too. "I'll go and dress," said she. "Then, Sir John, you shall take me riding, and for punishment I'll make you tell me all you know about this Sally Temple."

The new lady of Cumnor dressed in a very becoming habit she found in one of her wardrobes, and fairly danced to the stables. Sir John, with the aid of the head-groom, had picked out a mare that she could safely ride. She had no fear, and under her companion's watchful eye, cantered by his side down the avenue of beeches into the highroad. Her eyes shone, and she declared that she loved the motion, and added that she was really happy for the first time since she had left Pump Lane. "The country has some advantages, Jack," she said, "when the dragon's

not about. You handled him very well. I could scarcely keep from laughing at you."

"I cracked the whip louder than he did," agreed Sir John, pleased at his own shrewdness. He looked at the charming face and figure so near him, and his eyes shone. "Won't you marry me, Sally, dear?" he begged. "Then you needn't fear any dragons, here or at Drury Lane. Your path shall be strewn with roses, and I, the happiest man in all the world, will be always at your feet. Say yes, Sally."

She stroked her mare's glossy neck. "It's too fine a day to talk of such serious matters," she protested.

"The day will be finer yet if you say yes."

"I'm almost afraid of a lover who talks so well."

"My heart is stammering, if my words don't," he said.

"You must give me more time, Jack," she answered. "And—I'm not so good a horsewoman that I can think of two things at once."

She put her mare ahead of him, and kept in front, graceful as a swallow.

When they slowed down to a walk, the girl chattered about the trees and the open meadows, but Sir John would bring the talk back to his love for her. He used his shrewdest arguments, he flattered and cajoled, he pointed out how happy Charles Tree and his bride had been.

"But they've not been married a week yet, Jack," she said. "They're still on their honeymoon."

"Ours would last forever," he declared with passion.

She gave him a sidelong glance. "And yet you claim to know the world," she said. "Didn't the Countess of Kew run away with Hawkins, the prize-fighter?"

"Her husband was a dullard."

"Perhaps—but she didn't know her own heart when she married him. The other man stole it from her. That's the way with us women. We have to follow our hearts."

"And can't I find yours?"

"It's here," she said, motioning toward her breast.

"And it's free to all?" he asked.

"Free to all," she echoed; and again rode away from him.

He shook off his seriousness for the time, and was his usual amusing self. The girl was very happy, and not even the water at the ford in the river where they let their horses drink, laughed so lightly as she. But when the sun began to sink, she turned. "I must be riding back to Cumnor now," she said.

"There'll be a moon in a little time," he urged.

She shook her head. "If I were only Sally I might ride by moonshine, but the Lady Pamela must be discreet. Besides, there's no telling how stiff I'll be by morning."

So they rode back, Sir John revolving schemes by which he might win so much beauty, the girl as care-

free as the wind. The sight of Cumnor, however, reminded her of its owner; and she frowned.

Sir John noticed it. "Say yes to me, Sally, and we needn't go back."

"No; I must play the piece through," she declared. "That's an actress's lot."

They rode to the terrace, and Sir John lifted her from her saddle, and saw a groom take her horse. Then he rode away thoughtfully; and she went in at the great door of the hall.

But she had plenty of nerve, and she hummed a tune to herself as she went through the halls and up the stairs to her rooms. She knew that the Marquis expected her to sup with him, and she had Rachel dress her with great care. She bound her hair with a silken fillet, and fastened Sir John's string of pearls about her throat.

The dining-hall was lit with candles, which routed the twilight that tried to force an entrance through the mullioned windows. Romsey was there before her, standing in front of the chimney-piece. He bent his head in welcome to her, and she noticed that instead of his dark clothes his coat to-night was claret-colored, picked out with gold thread.

Their eyes met now and then across the table, but her smiles and words met such slight response that she resigned herself to silence. Gradually something of the old feeling of suspense that she had felt at their first meeting settled on her.

Presently Romsey pushed his plate away, touched his napkin to his lips, and looked directly at her. "While you were riding a man came here to see you," he said, "tricked out in all the colors of the rainbow. I was in the hall, and he told me his name, and asked to see you. He said he was Lord Verney, and had come to stay a fortnight in the country. Then he fell to prating of people in London like a court chamberlain."

"He's an old friend of mine," Pamela explained.

"So he said," agreed Romsey. "I disposed of him as quickly as I could, for I have no stomach for these peacock men."

Stung by his words and manner, Pamela rose from the table, and went into the great hall. She sat down by a front window. Thither, after a few moments, Romsey followed her. She knew he was standing near her, but she did not turn her eyes from the view through the window.

"So, cousin," he began abruptly, "we have three fine English gallants courting you. The red-cheeked Wife of Bath, Sir Fantastico Gorham, and this strutting Lord High Chamberlain. Each of them, I take it, is eager to wed my ward and cousin. Verily you have the knack of catching men."

She seemed to be paying no attention to him, far more interested in the park than in his words.

"And which of the three do you favor, the Wife,

the Fop, or the Chamberlain? Flesh, or fashion, or folly?"

"You're unjust to them," she protested suddenly.

"So? Perhaps your mind isn't made up yet. But to which of the three do you most incline?"

She turned directly toward him. "How should I know? No one has won me yet."

His black eyes gleamed. "Then I was right, and Englishmen are fools!" he exclaimed. "They shan't have another chance. I'll decide for you! I want to marry you myself, Pamela. You're the one woman I could want for wife."

She shrank away a little, and caught her hands in her lap. "Oh no, my lord, oh no; that couldn't be!"

He stepped so close that he stood just above her, towering as he had on that first night. His voice was low and clear. "But it shall be, Pamela; it shall be! Don't be afraid of me. None of these others could love you as I do."

"No, no!" she repeated, shaking her head. "I couldn't marry you."

The Marquis of Romsey was not used to being baffled, and he had evidently set his heart on having her for his wife. His quick decision did not surprise himself, for he frequently took swift and permanent impressions; but he concluded that perhaps he had startled the girl before him.

"It may be I'm too sudden, Pamela; but look how

it is with me. The women I've known before have been toys of the moment, such as hold a man by the lure of a dimple or some trick of the eyes; they come and go when we want to be amused, like music or the gaming-table. But you are a woman no man—once seeing—could ever forget, as far above these others as the stars above mere candles. This is the truth I speak."

His words ran straight, but were spoken with passionate eagerness that shook her. She tightened the grip of her fingers, and bent her head, so that he might not force her to look at him. "No, my lord—no, no—it can't be—for—I don't love you—not in the least," she murmured hurriedly.

"Not now, perhaps," he said; "I could hardly think that. But wed me, and the rest will come. It should be that way, Pamela. Give yourself to me, and your love will follow mine."

Her manner and voice grew beseeching. "Be gentle with me," she begged. "I'm only a girl; and taken quite unawares. I scarcely know you; and all I can tell now is that I've no such feeling for you."

"You want more time?" he demanded.

"Yes;" she hesitated; "but I think—I'm quite sure it would make no difference. We go separate ways."

Romsey was a very proud man, and had all the ignorance of pride. He saw a pliant girl, and he

felt that she was pitting her will against his. After all, he was the head of their house, and she was his ward and cousin. "You shall marry me," he declared positively, "and that will put an end to our argument. A man must rule his own house, and a woman must sink her wishes to his. I will have you for wife, Pamela, as surely as I stand here. Grow used to that thought as quick as possible."

"It's only a waste of time, thinking of it," she answered.

"Then waste the time!" he ordered. "And if any of those three who flutter round you—or any others —come here again, I shall send them packing, pitch them out as I would a thieving knave."

She dared to look at his bitter, arrogant face, and suddenly a fighting spirit equal to his rose in her. "I've never seen so mad a man," she said, "nor one so cold and hard. You ask for love with a club in your hand. That's how men win hate; and that's all I have to give you, hate and scorn and contempt."

"You say that, do you?" he answered, his anger rising in a cloud in his face. "Then I'll be a tyrant in my house. Go to your rooms and stay there, till you come to a different mind. I have mastered men before this; don't think that I can't rule a simple woman."

The girl's heart beat in her ears, and devils seemed loosened within her. Her nails dug into the flesh of her palms. But she contrived to laugh a little

rippling note that was maddening in its scorn. "Tyrant?" she cried. "You seem more like a play-actor to me!"

He did not deign to answer, but stood aside, looking toward the door to the west wing.

She would have liked to pull the roof of Cumnor down upon him; but instead she had to rise, cross the hall, and go through the door he indicated. But the scorn she had put into that word "play-actor" hung in the air, and she felt that it would echo in his ears for some time as her answer to his attempt at tyranny.

VI

LORD VERNEY SHOWS HIS METTLE.

RACHEL was used to her lady lying late in bed, but when the clock stood at ten she made bold to tiptoe into the room. A glance sufficed to show her that her mistress was staring at the canopy. Rachel, with a deprecatory cough, made her presence known; and the lady turned her head ever so little. "Well?" she demanded querulously.

"I beg your pardon, my lady," said Rachel, "but I feared you might be ill."

"So I am."

Rachel's face showed the greatest concern as she hurried to the bed. "Where is the pain, my lady? We have physick and simples of all kinds. Perhaps a powder —"

The lady rested her head on her arm, and turned her face fully toward the maid. Her hair made a wonderful cushion on the pillow. "No physick would ease me, Rachel. I'm ill of spirit—not of body. I'm in doubt what to do. Have you ever hated any one, Rachel? Hated them enough to cry for it?"

Rachel considered. "No, I think not, my lady," she answered categorically.

Her mistress let her hand fall on the coverlet, a tenacious little fist. "I've been lying here for hours, staring at nothing, and hating some one worse and worse."

"Who can it be, my lady?"

"A man."

Rachel echoed the word incredulously.

"Yes, a man; a cold, cruel creature, unmannered, bitter-tongued, evil-eyed; a hateful man!" The lady drew herself up on her elbow. "A very ogre, Rachel!"

"The good saints save us!" exclaimed the startled maid.

"Yes, so I say. Save us from looking on his hard face again!"

"What would he do to you?" asked Rachel, full of curiosity.

"Marry me; marry me out of hand, as a groom would bridle a horse."

The maid considered that, her head tipped a little to one side. "Indeed, and it's not an unnatural wish, perhaps," she concluded.

The lady blushed, and sat upright. "You would cozen me, Rachel. No, it's not the man's eyes I find fault with. I suppose they must serve him for looking. It's the black heart behind the eyes." She drew her knees up under the coverlet, and, chin in her

palms, rested her elbows on the height. "Have you ever been in love, Rachel?"

"Oh, my lady —"

"It's not an indelicate matter, foolish. It's the common lot. But I have never felt it, somehow. There is no one man I would dress to please above all others." Here she smiled. "No, I think of them all when I dress." She glanced at the maid. "Am I too forward, Rachel? Do I talk unmaidenlike? Set it down then because I am unhappy. A girl must find her entertainment somehow."

With that she surrendered herself into Rachel's care, and for a half-hour the maid was very busy. Again the wonderful chests and wardrobes were ransacked, and stockings and slippers cast about until shades that suited the chosen gown were found. Pamela did her own hair loosely about her head. "There's nothing so fetching as simplicity," she observed, as she sat before the mirror, "but it's so monstrous difficult to come by."

She was satisfied at last; and then she remembered something the toilet had driven from her mind. "But I'm a prisoner, Rachel!" she exclaimed. "My lord and I had hot words last night, and he bade me keep to my rooms. The hateful creature! I was not to stir beyond them —" she hesitated a moment, "and I don't believe I'd better."

The maid was busy putting the room to rights. "Never mind that," said Pamela. "Get me some

food. I'm famished." She spoke so positively that Rachel bounced out of the room in a hurry.

When she had finished breakfast Pamela sat down at the wide casement window. She was homesick, and would have given all the broad lawns, glowing flower-beds and great trees in the world for a sight of the shabby houses in Pump Lane. There was nothing for her to do, and she would not sew or read. Twice she decided to leave her rooms, and twice stopped with her hand on the door that led into the hallway. She did not want to meet the Marquis, since she felt quite certain that he intended to see that he was obeyed.

Presently, in the writing-room, she sat down at the little table and pulled paper and quill pen toward her. With much difficulty she wrote, "Dearest Gilly: I miss you and Kate very much. This place is very lonely, there is so much space, and no noises. The Marquis has come back. I hate him. He does not like people, nor anything but his own way. He is a monster. I'll stay in my rooms until the time is gone. I wish I were back in the Lane. Your loving Sally."

She dried the writing with sand, and read it over. Then she considered whether she should send it, meantime gazing out through the window. It would be next to impossible for her to find a messenger to take a letter to London, and should the note reach Gilbert it would only make him more uneasy than

ever for her. Finally she tore the writing into little bits, and threw them on the floor.

The day seemed very long to Pamela. Rachel brought in a great basket of flowers, and her mistress put them in vases about her rooms. At mid-afternoon she lunched on nectarines and cakes. But when the shadows began to lengthen out-of-doors she could stand the inactivity no longer. She considered what she might do, and then sat down at the table, and wrote to Lord Verney. "The black man will not let me out of my rooms in the west wing. Do something for me." She signed it with an S. Then she sealed the note, and bade Rachel give it privately to one of the grooms, with directions as to how he might learn in the village where the gentleman addressed was to be found.

The lovely, lonely summer night drew on, and the girl sat at her window like a prisoned bird. Every now and then she thought of Romsey, and wondered what he was doing, but she caught no sight of him on the lawn, and presently, for want of a better occupation, she went to bed.

When she woke the next day the sun imperatively summoned her out of bed, as he often called to her through the little window-panes of her attic room in Pump Lane. She sprang up, and in her bare feet ran to the seat beneath the windows, and knelt on it. The air was crystal-clear, and the far-reaching park delightful to the eye. But the view was only of

trees and grass and hedges, and she tired of it in five minutes. "Another day like yesterday!" she sighed. "I can't endure it! I will go out and play with some one—" she doubled up her fist—"ogre or no ogre!" She tossed her head proudly. "I can give him back word for word."

She turned from the window, and in doing so caught her reflection in a large oval mirror. She was a good judge of beauty, and she smiled with pleasure at the picture she saw. The lovely creature, her red-gold hair falling loosely to her shoulders, her eyes as clear as a sunlit pool, her cheeks like dew-kissed roses, her soft throat showing at the opening in her lace-edged nightdress, was far more radiant than any of the titled dames in Cumnor's portrait gallery. She dimpled, and shook a finger at herself. "Oh, Sally Temple, you are pretty, you good-for-nothing minx!"

She decided she would not dare the ogre until she learned what Lord Verney meant to do. That gentleman must have her message by this time, and if he were the man of spirit she thought him he would surely contrive some way to entertain her. So she dressed in a lavender gown, that would have been almost too daring in any other girl of her color, and breakfasted, and inspected another basket of flowers from the gardens, and chatted with her maid.

"And what does the Marquis do with himself all

day?" she asked Rachel, as the maid was filling the vases in her sitting-room.

"Indeed, he does nothing, my lady. Gregory says he's never seen such a man. He eats little food, and swears at the wines, and sits by himself in the hall for hours at a time. Sometimes he walks on the terrace, back and forth, back and forth, like a bear in a cage."

"A pleasant man, indeed," said Pamela. "Oh, Rachel, think what it must be to have so many dark crimes on one's soul!"

"As the Marquis has, my lady?"

Pamela nodded. "He must have thousands; and the worst ones! Those Italians think of little else. He told me so himself."

"And he so young!" said Rachel, pityingly.

"But he began in his cradle, and now they troop before him to torment him. At least I hope they do."

"The poor man!" sighed Rachel.

"No, the wicked one. He only gets his deserts."

At one of the clock Pamela had dinner, and began to wonder when she should hear from Lord Verney. The afternoon passed like the one before, and the sun hid himself behind the trees to the west. The lawn below her sitting-room window was in shade, and, looking out, she envied the peacocks that were strutting on the other side of the little vine-sheltered seat that was built into the hedge.

Starlight had come when she caught sight of a

man crossing toward her wing of the house. She knew by his tall figure and long stride that he must be Lord Verney, and waved her hand. He quickened his pace until he stood under her window, and then saluted her with a sweep of his hat.

She put a finger to her lips, and he nodded comprehendingly. He held something under his arm, and now, taking it in both hands, he made a gesture of throwing. Pamela signaled that she understood, and reaching out caught the light bundle that he tossed up to her.

It proved to be a little ladder, cunningly made of rope. At one end were two loose strands, and these she quickly knotted about the leg of a heavy chest of drawers that stood near the window. Verney gave a pull at the ladder from below, and finding that it held firm, gestured to show that he would come up; but Pamela shook her head, and motioned him away from the wall.

The rightful Lady Pamela Vauclain might have found it hard to descend even such a short flight, but this Lady Pamela was both strong and agile. She slipped into the window ledge, and turning, caught her feet in the rope rungs. Holding her skirts tight about her, she went down the ladder, and finally, on the turf, with a flushed face and dancing eyes, she turned to the young man. "Quick," she whispered softly, "to the gazebo in the hedge!" and ran that way.

The seat she had chosen was well sheltered from the house, for the hedge on either side was very thick, and vines had been trained over a lattice so that they hung like a short curtain at the front. Pamela ran in, and sat down on the bench inside, and Lord Verney followed.

"How good you were to come!" she exclaimed joyfully.

The young man was beaming. "I'd have come through fire and water to you, Sally!" he said, his eyes fixed on her face. Then he drew a little packet from his coat-pocket, and, undoing it, showed her a girdle made of cloth of gold, and with a buckle set with amethysts. "The closest I could come to your incomparable hair," he explained. "See if it fits;" and he slipped the girdle about her waist, and snapped the catch.

"It's perfect!" she cried. "But I don't deserve such a gift."

"You deserve more than any man could give you," said the enraptured suitor. "Listen to me;—I've waited so long for such a chance as this."

She sat back dutifully, looking out at the shadows on the grass.

"I love you, Sally;—will you be Lady Verney? There's nothing under Heaven I wouldn't do for you. Think how happy we could be together; no other pair could ever be so happy. We would live in a little house I own in the country—"

"But not on bread and cheese and kisses," she interrupted; "I've too much appetite."

"On all the sweet things in the world, dear heart. It would be paradise." He leaned still closer to her, and caught her hand.

"There are so many different views of paradise," she said.

"Mine is the place where you are."

"But I'm not in paradise half the time," she answered. "You've no idea how cross and sulky I can be," and she drew her hand away from his, presumably to fasten a loose strand of hair.

"At least give me leave to try to win you," he pleaded. "Say that I'm not distasteful to you."

"Indeed I think you are very delightful, my lord. You should make some girl very happy."

"Why not you, then, Sally?"

"Well, you see—" she began; and stopped. Verney, watching her, noticed that her eyes widened. He turned, and saw a man standing not a dozen yards away, staring into their shelter. "The devil!" Verney ejaculated; and Pamela, with a quick intake of her breath, murmured, "Yes, it's he!"

The man outside stepped a little nearer. "Doubtless the seat was made for such meetings," said he evenly, "but it happens to stand on my land. A kitchen-wench and her lover would hardly dare—can it be that my cousin—" He left the rest unsaid.

Verney, a straightforward man, got to his feet.

"It is I, Verney," he said. "I told you several days ago that I was a friend of this lady." Not liking to stay in the shadows he held out his hand to Pamela and led her into the starlight.

"So?" said Romsey, his eyes taking in the girl from the crown of her head to her slippers. "I bade you keep your rooms, and you do this. What is the meaning of it?"

"I thrust myself on her," said Verney. "I begged her to join me here."

"No," Pamela broke in quickly, "I came of my own accord. I'm no child to be told what I shall do."

"No child, of a surety!" exclaimed Romsey. "And no crack-brained maid. I will not have my cousin meeting men in the dark. In Italy we'd deal with such a matter swiftly, and as it deserves." He twisted his black moustache. "But in England—in England men's veins run water, and they talk like schoolboys, mumbling about for words."

Now Verney was neither slow-witted like the Earl of Dorset, nor adroit-minded like Sir John, but choleric and quick to resent an insult. "I don't know what you have in mind," said he, "but I'm not one to stand being lectured by any man."

"I had in mind," said Romsey, his eyes mocking the other, "that in Italy if I found my ward alone with a man in such a place as that I would let his blood. A blow on the cheek—or an ill-sounding word—and we should see what manner of man he was."

"No, no!" cried Pamela, appealing for peace between them. "There was no harm in this!"

"You see, she says there was no harm," said Romsey. "She knows her English schoolboys thoroughly; don't you, Pam?"

Lord Verney promptly stepped forward, and caught Romsey's arm in his right hand. "I've had enough of this talk," he said. "You insult us both with your boasting and your lies."

The dark man flung the other's hand away. "Have a curb to your tongue!" he cried. "I may forget it's England."

"Forget what you will," said Verney, now glaring at him. "I'll teach you manners—and, by Heaven! you'll need them if you're to stay here."

"My lord," broke in Pamela, "it was the most innocent meeting in the world; I was tired of staying in my rooms, and sent for him to entertain me. Don't let hot words make the matter worse." She held out her hands to Verney. "And you, my lord, I beg you to go at once. It's such a simple affair. Good-night, please leave me now."

Romsey's eyes were on Verney's face, and the latter, as if drawn by some spell, had to turn his own from Pamela to that inquisitive, malevolent gaze. What he saw there made him shut his lips tightly and shake his head at Pamela's appeal.

"Well," said Romsey, "you have heard the lady; will you go?"

"When I am ready," said Verney. Then he bobbed his head at the other man, and added, "Come, let's have the matter in hand."

"You will pardon us, Pamela," said Romsey; and turning, he walked toward the main door of Cumnor. After him went Verney, his head high in the air. The girl, greatly agitated, followed, appealing again to Verney to make his peace and go.

Romsey went in at the door, and Pamela caught at Verney's sleeve as they came up to the terrace. "Oh, for my sake leave him!" she begged. "He's evil as a snake, he'll do you harm. He's killed many men. For my sake go!"

"I can't now," said Verney abruptly, and pulling his sleeve loose, followed Romsey into the hall.

Pamela looked after them, very much alarmed. "Oh, you foolish men!" she cried, and stamped her foot. "Why don't you listen to me? Oh, you men! And all over nothing at all; both mad; oh, why don't you come to your senses?" She stood there, calling to them, until the futility of her words occurred to her, and she waited, feeling strangely deserted, and utterly unavailing with such headstrong creatures.

Presently she moved to the open doorway and looked in. The hall was lighted by half-a-dozen candles, and in the middle of the great room Romsey and Verney faced each other, each armed with a dueling-sword. Pamela gripped the wall, and watched while the two tense figures moved in a great

circle, and the light on the foils showed how the steel tongues shot in and out.

It was clear to a novice that Romsey loved this work. The two were of equal height and strength, but Romsey's sword-play was vastly superior; his wrist and arm were perfectly flexible, while Verney's motions were stiff and unskilful. Verney kept on the defense, his face absorbed and watchful, but Romsey smiled and his eyes shone. His own peculiar grace made the other seem singularly awkward, and as his confidence in his skill grew his sword-play rose in daring.

Pamela watched the wheeling men spell-bound, her heart beating wildly as she realized Verney's impotence, and her eyes returning again and again to the devilish glow that lighted Romsey's face.

She saw Romsey lift his left arm suddenly, thrust, and in some way catching the other's hilt with the point of his foil send Verney's light blade clattering to the floor. The unarmed man jumped backward to save himself, but Romsey rested his foil by his side, and bent slightly forward. "Take it up if you will," he said. "The issue is decided."

"You are the better swordsman," said Verney, drawing a handkerchief from his coat-pocket and wiping his beaded face.

"You might learn in time," said Romsey, and added with a chuckle, "It took some courage for you to stand before me."

"Indeed it did!" cried Pamela from the doorway. "It wasn't a fair fight. You know it wasn't." She hurried to Verney, her face all appeal. "Oh, be satisfied now."

"We are all satisfied," said Romsey. "Bid him good-night, Pam, the matter's ended."

"Good-night, my lord," she said, but it seemed as if she were ignoring Romsey. "You were kind to come to me when I wrote."

Verney took the hand she offered and bent over it. "Good-night. I will come again," said he, and with an abrupt bow to Romsey he stalked from the hall.

When the girl looked about, Romsey had laid his foil on a chair, and his eyes were considering her. "You said it wasn't a fair fight," he remarked, "and it was not; but that is the way of the world. Some must be stronger than others, and I am stronger than these men you have about you. Women should love strong men."

He went up to her quickly, but she put out her hands defensively. "Please say nothing more to me now," she begged. "There's been enough trouble to-night."

But his eyes caught hers in spite of her. "I shall never give you up," he said in a low voice. "You are beyond all value to me. Your face would make me do anything, call me through the Pit and far beyond. I am no child, Pamela, and I mean to have you for my wife. Give in to me now."

She summoned all her courage, for it was no easy thing to dare those dark eyes. "No," she answered, "never, never, never!"

He drew back, his brows angry. "Yet I'll have you one way or another. I'm master here. Go to your rooms, and keep to them, as I bade you."

"Very good," she said; "I prefer to keep them when we two are here alone."

She walked past him, proudly scornful, and went to her own apartments. There she sat down in her sitting-room and thought for a long time. She could hardly believe that she was still simply a girl of Pump Lane, she seemed to be dealing with such passionate undercurrents.

After a time she noticed that the little rope-ladder was still hanging at the open window, and she drew it in, and stowed it in a drawer of one of the chests. She looked out at the stars, and whispered a little message to Gilbert Stanes. "Oh, keep me in your thoughts, Gilly," she murmured. "I need that if I'm to weather all these storms."

VII

THE RESULTS OF AN INDISCRETION

THE fine weather ended in two days of rain, which may have benefited the lawns and the hedgerows, but was certainly trying to Pamela's disposition. She was restless, and kept constantly comparing Lord Verney with Sir John and the Earl, and wondering if admiration of the former's bravery could lead to a warmer feeling. It was hard for her to be so cramped. She who was used to seeing much of her neighbors and to gossiping with them, saw only Rachel; and Rachel proved of a narrow intelligence. Her talk was usually limited to intense admiration of everything Pamela wore, or did, or said; and, although the girl could endure that attitude for an hour or so if the part were well played, she found the flattery bored her when so outspoken. Finally she yawned in the maid's face. "Oh, Rachel, be merciful!" she begged. "I'm not an angel, and have no wish to be—for some time at least. If I could have my wish I'd be the most popular actress in England, which is quite a different thing."

"Oh, my lady!" exclaimed the maid, horrified.

"Oh, Rachel, you silly woman! A popular actress is much like any one else."

"But surely not so modest, my lady," objected Rachel.

Pamela's eyes twinkled, and she caught her two hands back of her head. "Oh, as to modesty," said she, "there are so many ways of taking that. One of your country wenches will wear her bodice laced tight about her throat, but her feet bare; while in town it's the other way. And I've heard tell that in some heathen countries it's the fashion to wear almost nothing at all."

"Oh, fie, my lady!" expostulated Rachel, blushing.

At that Pamela laughed. "I've shocked you, have I? At least that's something new. I wish you could do the same for me, to make the time pass quicker."

The hours dragged, and the girl beat on the rain-swept window-panes with her knuckles. She thought over the scenes between Romsey and her three suitors. Sir John had talked the tyrant into silence, and Verney had made the tyrant concede his courage, while the Earl, she fancied, could stand a good deal of tongue-drubbing without loss of self-esteem. Here were three wonderful matches ready to her hand, and she could not decide on any of them. She sighed because she was so difficult to please, and yet admitted that she found it very interesting to see what such different types of men would do to win her.

She had made up her mind to stay out the time at

Cumnor in spite of the monster Romsey. She told herself she was not afraid of him, that she was not afraid of any man in the world. So she considered, and drummed on the window-panes. But the hours passed slowly, and she went to bed without having seen any one all day but Rachel.

The next morning, which was still rainy, taxed Pamela's resolution to the breaking point. She was unused to such confinement, and it tried her temper. She must have some excitement, and at last she decided that at nightfall she would go down to the hall and beard Romsey to his face, no matter what came of it. As she was having dinner in her sitting-room, however, the sun came out, and her spirits rose. She sat at the window, admiring the flowers and trees, fresh from their bath.

As she sat there she saw a plump young man approaching the house from the west. He was very elegantly clad, his coat being plum-colored, and his trousers bottle-green. Pamela regarded him thoughtfully. To be the Countess of Dorset was a condition not to be despised, and the plump young man would be easy for a woman to handle. A little flattery would keep him in good humor. She saw him stop to loosen the neck-band at his throat. Some day he would be very stout, perhaps quite fat. She laughed softly; the Earl was mopping his brow with a handkerchief.

Pamela watched him approach by the path at the

side of the gardens, and stop to stare at the windows of the west wing. Then she leaned out, and called "Good-day." The Earl looked up, smiled, and took off his hat. "Won't you come down?" he asked, in a loud whisper.

She had an amusing idea, and calling down, "Wait a minute," drew back, and went to the chest of drawers where she had hidden the little ladder. She took it out, fastened it securely, and unrolled it from the window. "Now," she murmured, "I'll test his devotion;" and said aloud, "I'm a prisoner. You must come up to me."

The Earl considered the ladder for a minute, tried his weight on the lowest rung, and then cautiously began to ascend. He was puffing when he reached the top, but managed to clamber, although clumsily, over the window-ledge into the room. "It's like climbing into Heaven," he said, standing up. "Does he really keep you shut up like a prisoner?"

"He tries to," Pamela answered, as she drew up the ladder, and threw it on the floor.

"But we can outwit him, eh?" said the Earl, much pleased with himself. "What luck you found a ladder ready to hand!"

"Wasn't it? Though I'm doubtful if Lady Pam ought to invite a man to climb to her rooms."

"I'm the soul of discretion, Sally. I never tell what I know."

"Indeed, and that's a rare trait in a man. How do

you find the milkmaids of Surrey—are their hands as large as ever?" She sat down on a cushioned divan, prepared to be entertained.

"I didn't come here to talk of milkmaids," he answered stoutly. "See what I've brought you, Sally." He fumbled in his waistcoat pocket, and produced a small box. Opening it, he showed her a gold ring set with a ruby. "Let me put it on your finger," he said, stooping over her.

She held out her hand, and he slipped the circlet onto her ring finger.

"It's the prettiest ruby in England!" she exclaimed, very much delighted as she watched it sparkle as she held it at different angles.

"For the prettiest girl in the world," said he, sitting down beside her on the divan. He touched his handkerchief again to his face, and cleared his throat as if for an oration. "I don't know how much you know of my family," he began. "We came to England with William the Conqueror."

"Yes?" she said, encouragingly.

"I have three other titles besides my Earldom, a house in town, Holker Hall here in Surrey, another place in Devon, and one in Yorkshire. Fifty thousand acres of land go with the titles. That's not bad, is it?"

"Indeed it's not, my lord. It sounds very grand."

"And all this I offer you, Sally, if you'll marry me."

"But you forget that I'm a girl who lives in Pump Lane, and plays at the theatre."

"No matter as to that," he declared, looking at her. "You're the prettiest woman in all the three kingdoms."

"Are looks so much?" she asked, demurely.

"And the merriest, and the brightest," he went on, more warmly. "I place all my titles, houses, and acres, at your feet." He actually seemed to be depositing them in bulk.

"It is a great deal, my lord; but—in marriage the man matters so much."

"Why, I'm as loving as a—as a turtle-dove," protested the Earl, seizing at the first simile.

"But turtle-doves are too gentle," she argued.

"And as obstinate as a—as a—" he felt about for something to please her capriciousness.

"No, don't say it," she begged. "I can't stand obstinate men. Hark, what's that noise?" She turned her head quickly.

Some one was knocking at the door, and Pamela rose and crossed the room. "Who's there?" she whispered.

"It's Rachel, my lady," said the maid's voice. "Lord Romsey wants you to join him on the terrace. He says you'll enjoy the freshness of the air."

Pamela hesitated. "Very well," she decided, "tell him I'm coming shortly."

With mischief in her eyes she looked about at the

Earl. "I don't suppose you'd care to make a third on the terrace, to enjoy the air?" she inquired. "Lord Romsey is so thoughtful of me that I find it hard to refuse anything he asks. I'm afraid I must go, though I assure you I'd much rather stay here with you."

Those last words—as she spoke them—were honey to the Earl. He stood up, and held out both hands appealingly. "Tell me where we can meet soon, Sally," he begged. "Name some place where this fellow can't find us, and we can be quite alone."

"He has more than a thousand eyes," she answered, shaking her head dubiously. "If I were only Sally Temple I could find a dozen places, but the Lady Pamela—" and she gestured with her hands to show the difficulty of her situation. "But you must go now, for he soon runs out of patience."

The Earl looked from the girl to the ladder at the open window, and back again, and began to show signs of the stubbornness he had boasted. "Romsey's family is no better than mine," he said, pouting. "Not so old, in fact. I don't care to be treated like some pot-boy come to see a maid. I'm a peer of the realm—"

"Yes," Pamela interrupted briskly; "but you are also a man, and, seeing that you have climbed in at my window, it's easiest to climb out the same way, without making explanations to my cousin."

"As a gentleman, it seems to me—" he began.

"As a man, whether pot-boy or peer, I beg you to go," she urged; and started to push him toward the window.

"I have no fear of Romsey," said the Earl, unwillingly lifting one foot to the window-ledge. "I'd like him to know that."

"You've made that clear to him," said a voice behind them; and Pamela and the Earl, turning sharply, found Romsey standing in the doorway regarding them.

The Earl withdrew his foot from the ledge, and stood up very straight. "I prefer a ladder to climbing stairs," said he. "It's the most direct approach."

"A most admirable preference," agreed Romsey, walking into the room, "and one backed by many a famous precedent. Ladies have been visited that way before, though I'm not certain that any of our house have. That, however, is always for the lady to decide."

"I made use of that privilege," said Pamela.

"You seem to make use of many, cousin," said Romsey. "And doubtless this gentleman appreciates them." A gleam of malice shot into his dark eyes. "And does he let you do the suing too—or can he find his tongue?"

"I speak for myself," said the Earl. "If there's anything underhand here, it's not of my choosing. I have asked this lady to marry me, and she can

marry into no better family in England. You see fit to keep her to yourself, and so force me to find her as best I may. I have the right to speak, and she to hear me, if it pleases her."

Romsey nodded his head, as if quite in accord.

"How can she decide whom she will marry unless she's free to consider?" the Earl continued, warming to his subject. "Suppose you wished to marry her yourself; wouldn't you let her compare you with other men? Otherwise she might prefer another after you were wed. I ask no favors but a free field and a chance to speak, and that is every man's right."

The little man was warming to his subject, and his usually mild eyes were actually eloquent as he made himself a champion of the rights of love.

"You credit women with brains, then?" asked Romsey, his arms folded, and his manner inquisitorial.

"I regard this lady as wiser than any man I know," retorted the Earl with zeal.

"And was she wise to take you into her rooms," said Romsey, "when she knew you preferred a ladder to the stairs?"

"Doubtless she knew she could trust an Earl of Dorset anywhere," asserted the little man.

"How, are you all so virtuous, then?" A smile curled Romsey's lips. "On my word, you do human nature credit!"

"My family are neither rascals nor tyrants," declared the other.

Romsey took a step forward. "Enough of your family!" he exclaimed. "We are both men; and my cousin is an unsophisticated girl. I prefer not to try your notions of virtue too far. Will you leave by the stairs or the ladder?"

"I will leave as I please," said the Earl, hotly.

"Of course; but which do you please?"

The Earl turned to Pamela, as if in hesitation, but her smile resolved his doubt. "You showed me the way to happiness through your window and I prefer to retire by the same road," said he. "I hope to grow familiar with the pathway."

He made quite a gallant figure as he stood there, rising against Romsey's malevolence, and the girl's heart went out to his spirited stand. "Good-night, my lord," she said in a gentle voice.

Without a look at the other man the Earl stepped to the window-ledge, vaulted up to it, caught his foot on the ladder, and lowered himself outside. No one but himself knew how perilously near he came to breaking his neck as he went down it.

"Well," said the Marquis, when the other had disappeared, "this is a pretty affair! A man steals into your room through the window, and we let him go, unharmed, to boast of it. I should have flung his fat body down the stairs!"

Pamela faced him hotly. "And you steal into my

rooms too," she said. "At least he was invited, and you were not."

Romsey rested his hands on the back of a chair. "You are either surprisingly innocent or very daring," said he. "Such adventures as this do not help a woman's name."

"Then set me free!" she demanded. "Do you think I can stay in this place day after day, seeing no one but Rachel, amusing myself by listening to birds from my window? I wasn't brought up in a convent; I must have freedom, or there's no knowing what I may do."

"Have it, then!" he answered. "I'm not afraid of rivals such as these. See them where you will, but remember that your fame is mine, and that too great innocence is more dangerous than too great knowledge." He took a few paces up and down the room while she watched him, but he did not approach close to her. When he stood still he was at the door. "To these three you are a woman who can dress to please them, talk and laugh to amuse them, but to me you are—" he stopped and stared at her, "the woman who comes in dreams. I have waited for you; and now, by the living God, I will not let you go!"

She grew pale before his passionate outburst. "Please leave me," she begged.

"I will not let you go," he repeated. "Since that first night I knew I would not let you go."

She plucked up courage to move away from the

window and go through the curtains that hung at her bedroom door.

Alone, he looked after her, a strange far-seeing expression on his suddenly tempestuous face. Intense feeling had banished his brooding look, and made him another man. Then slowly amazement came into his eyes. He had never been denied the thing he craved, and he could not understand this new experience. Something had mastered him, and was riding him as the relentless Arab breaks his steed of the desert.

VIII

THE DRAGON PROVES HIS TITLE

THE house and grounds of Cumnor were again free to Pamela, who was at liberty to do exactly as she pleased. But in spite of the beautiful gardens, the kennels and the stables, the lodge-keeper's children and the nearby tenants, it seemed to her as if there was always a shadow lurking in the background, the figure of Romsey watching her. The great estate should have been a paradise in summer, and there were times when she could imagine how easily it might become one; but the presence of the Marquis spoiled it all for her. His image kept thrusting itself upon her until she longed for Pump Lane, for Gilly and Kate and the neighbors, for anything to shut the thought of him away from her.

When they met at the dinner-table, or in the hall, or on the terrace, he was civil, and at least pretended an interest in all she had to say. But she knew that there was a great gulf that separated him from all the youths and men she had known in London, and the gulf seemed to have no bridging for her feet. She decided that he was capable of doing unprece-

dented things, indeed she sometimes felt that his nature craved what was impossible for others, but no sooner did she try to find out what he was actually like in any one direction than he checked her search by some contrary word or act.

She was in the garden one afternoon, filling a basket with roses, when Sir John appeared. "You've proved a very good fairy to our bride and groom," he said, "for I've just heard from Charles Tree that he and his lady were married again on her coming-of-age birthday, and that his lawyers have made her property secure. A day or two more, and you may safely take your flight back to town;—unless," he added, smiling, "you like the part of Lady Pamela well enough to keep it longer."

She shook her head at his suggestion. "The part has its drawbacks, Jack."

"Meaning your guardian? Has he been unkind lately?"

She sat down on the garden-bench, and placed the basket of roses on the ground. "It's his strangeness that chiefly troubles me. Do you know, if he were any other man I could almost feel sorry for him."

"Sorry for the monster! Don't waste your sympathy on such a creature, Sally, when others near at hand deserve it so much more. Here am I—"

Just then a voice interrupted them from the other side of the low wall at the end of the garden. "Dash me, if it's not Jack Gorham!"

Sir John wheeled about. "Why, here's that rascal Verney!" he cried, very much surprised. "What made you come down here in the country?"

The new arrival approached them, his expression that of a man not over-well pleased at his own discovery. "To tell the truth, I've been trying to keep this lady company," he explained, "but she doesn't seem to be in need of that."

"Why, so have I!" said Sir John. "In fact, I've been stopping at the inn in the village for a fortnight, cooling my heels, and thinking of ways to amuse her."

"While I've been staying at my aunt's house, doing the same thing." Here Verney looked reproachfully at Pamela. "You never told me Jack was at hand too!"

"I didn't know you were so much interested in Sir John," she said sweetly, and made room for the two men to sit either side of her on the bench. "I'd a notion you were more concerned with—oh, with whatever men go to the country for."

"Chiefly concerned with you," burst out the frank Verney.

"But think of me at that lonely inn in the village," put in Sir John, "taking my dinner alone;" and in his turn he looked his reproach at the girl.

"I thought you were quite busy making hay, Jack," she said, "while the sun shines, as the proverb says."

"But my sun doesn't shine," he retorted. Then as he looked away from her he began to laugh. "Damme, see who comes now!" he chuckled; and pointed to the well-worn path that led up to the garden.

"Our little Earl!" cried Verney. "On my soul, this is a pretty party—much like town!"

It was in fact the Earl, his face a study in amazement, who bore down upon them. "Is this Vauxhall, or Cumnor?" he demanded, stopping before the bench. "Sally, where did these two drop from?"

"Drop from?" echoed Sir John. "Why, I've been living in the country."

"And so have I," said Verney. "It's you who are the stranger."

"I opened Holker Hall," explained the Earl, "just in order to be near our Lady Pam."

Each of the three men looked at the girl accusingly, to be met by her laughter. "I'd a notion that men were better pleased when they thought they had a field all to themselves," she protested. "I only meant to please you."

"So they are," agreed Verney. "There was no need of you two bearing her company."

"Listen to him!" exclaimed Sir John. "I'll wager we'd each say the same."

The Earl was fidgeting nervously from one foot to the other, and swinging his hat in his hand. "To make the situation entirely clear," he began, "allow

me to say that I have asked her to do me the honor of becoming the Countess of Dorset."

There was a pause, broken ultimately by Lord Verney. "But I have asked her to marry me," he declared stubbornly.

Sir John, sitting close beside her, looked into Pamela's face. "She is also considering my proposal," said he, suavely.

The girl, more flushed at each speech, gazed down at her lap. "You see how it is," she said, "you have all been so kind to me. Now what is a poor, simple-minded maid to decide?"

"There are the best of reasons why you should take me," began the Earl.

"What have reasons to do with it?" interrupted Verney warmly. "The truth of the matter is that every man with eyes in his head loves Sally Temple!"

Sir John nodded. "You're right there. Now I shouldn't wonder if even the black Romsey was falling under her spell." Again he looked closely at the girl. "Is it so? Hasn't the Marquis hinted—anything?"

The word "hint" was so incongruous that the girl flushed deeper than ever, and actually had to laugh.

"Has he dared to make love to you?" demanded Verney.

"He has his own way of doing things," she answered, evasively.

There fell a moment's silence, and then Sir John

chuckled. "What a pretty pickle! Four of us here together!"

The Earl was making ready to speak again. "I've met the man, and it's certain he must not have her," said he. "We three must stand together against him in her defense."

"My hand on that," said Verney.

"And mine," agreed Sir John.

"It's most unnecessary," said Pamela. "I can't abide him—that's certain."

"But he is such a beast," put in Verney.

"And he thinks you're in his power," declared Sir John.

"You're all so kind to me," said Pamela, looking up. "Surely no girl ever had such friends before."

The idea of this common enemy gave the three men a bond, but none of them wished to leave the field free to his rivals, and it was evident that no one could do much to further his own cause in the presence of the others. Therefore, when a footman arrived with word that dinner waited, though Pamela invited them all to stay, the three, as though by some tacit understanding, declined the invitation unanimously.

"At least we have nothing to fear from him," said Sir John, after they took their leave.

"We can be assured of that," Verney agreed.

"He puts me in mind," declared the Earl, "of a scurvy dog in the manger. And," he added stoutly, "I for one don't fear his bark nor his bite."

Then the three marched away together, while Sally, catching her basket of flowers on her arm, waved her hand and smiled after them, finding them all good fellows, each in his different way.

It was a striking contrast to go from these three gentlemen, each of them trying to please her, into the great dark-paneled dining-room, and find herself seated opposite to the forbidding Romsey. She still felt that sense of tension whenever she looked up from her plate and found his eyes fixed on her, and the blood came quickly to her cheeks when his low voice broke the silence that frequently settled on them. During dinner that day she had the sensation that he was keeping some matter of importance in reserve, and trying to curb the impatience that was habitual with him. She was glad when dinner was finished, and she could go to her own rooms, and later leave the house and walk across the free fields to the cottage of an old woman, crippled with rheumatism, who blessed her for her cheering company.

By nightfall she was back at Cumnor. It pleased her to dress in a different gown, as if that would tend to lighten the evening she must spend under the same roof with Romsey. At supper she told him of her visits to his tenants, while he made short comments, or listened in his morose silence.

When she left the dining-room she seated herself at her favorite window in the hall, and fell into her custom of picturing Gilly sitting at his window at this

hour, looking into the Lane. Presently she heard Romsey approach, and looked up at him, attempting a friendly smile. "Does the country make you restless at night?" she asked, for want of something to say.

"How long is this stubbornness of yours to last, Pamela?" he said, ignoring her question.

"This stubbornness of mine?" she repeated, as if in surprise.

"Yes; you've seen these other men, and you've seen me; let's have the matter settled."

"Perhaps I had better leave Cumnor, and go somewhere else," she suggested.

Instantly she caught the old imperious flash in his eye. "You shall not leave Cumnor, and you shall hear plain speech from me. You're not in love with any of those three."

She looked away from him, letting the truth of his statement go by default of any answer.

"And you never will be," he went on, even more positively. "And that being settled, there remains me." He reached out his hand to an arm-chair, and pulling it around, sat down in it. "I must teach you to understand me," he said. "I have been alone the greater part of my life, and never went to school and college as English boys do, but have lived chiefly with older people, or with servants, whose whole concern was to do my bidding. The men and women of my own class that I've known have all spent their days at the same business—helping themselves to

whatever they wanted. Once I talked for several days with a Bishop of Rome, and I thought he was going to show me something new, but later I learned that he was spoiling the treasury of a dozen abbeys to heap their revenues on his Messalina, and so his talk lost its value. Every one was greedy; even the people, who lived like beasts, doubtless took whatever they could. So I did like the rest, and took this and that and the other, until my appetite was gone." His fingers tightened on the arms of his chair as he stared at her. "We are gluttons all. Sometimes I hate the whole wolfish pack, myself among them." He dropped into his brooding.

The girl was looking out at the park, now almost swallowed by the darkness, and lonely as a desert.

"But since the world is so we must take it so," he muttered.

"And you think you know it?" she asked, her thoughts on Pump Lane.

"I knew it before I was twenty; I went to the Pope's court at Rome when I was eighteen."

There was a long pause before he spoke again. "I came back to England despising everything in it, because I had learned in Italy that the English are hypocrites. But I have found something new here in finding you, something I never thought to find at all."

"I'm sorry," she answered, as quietly as she could.

Romsey leaned forward. "Sorry! When I have

found you at last! Now you understand me. We are wasting time. I must make up your mind for you. I shall have the curate here to-morrow; and he shall wed us. The world will call it a very proper match."

The girl instantly stiffened. "Not if you were the only man alive!" she said, passionately.

"I shall settle this matter," he returned, nodding at her. Then he stood up, and with a slight inclination of the head turned, and went through the doorway that led to his own apartments.

Pamela kept her tongue, though a storm of words came hurrying to her lips. She longed to make return for his domineering speech and manner, but knew that it was impossible for her. In his world his ward and cousin was virtually his chattel, and there would be nothing wrong in ordering the clergyman to marry her to him. She trembled as she thought of such a situation, and her monstrous plight if she were really his.

After a time her native sense came to her aid. If she stayed another day at Cumnor he would have the curate there; if she told him that she was not his cousin, the Lady Pamela Vauclain, but only Sally Temple, an actress of Pump Lane, she would be at his mercy, and he would not be apt to be gentle with her when he learned how he had been tricked. Out of her thoughts one idea came clearly, that, although the month she had meant to stay was not yet up, she must escape from Cumnor. She had gained some

advantage for Charles Tree and his bride, and must look out for herself.

She knew that this was what Gilly would advise her, and before she left her seat at the window she had laid her plans for getting back to town.

As she stood in her handsome bedroom taking a gilded fillet from her hair, she gave a sigh of relief as she thought that this was the last night she would sleep beneath the same roof with Romsey. She felt no regret at leaving the fine apartments, nor the gowns and jewels, nor her station as a lady of quality; she would far rather be the simple girl of London, with her little attic chamber, her few dresses, and the liberty of the town. "To-morrow or the next night I should see Gilly and Kate!" she murmured, as she climbed into her high bed, "and I hope I may never look into this man's bitter face again!"

IX

THE FLIGHT OF THE LADY

THE sun had only lately risen when our Lady Pamela opened her eyes next morning. She did not go to sleep again, but jumped out of bed in a most business-like manner, and began to dress. She chose the same clothes she had worn to Cumnor, looking a little doubtful, however, at the shoes, which were really only slippers, and not over-serviceable for walking. She spent small time on her toilette, and finished by binding her hair close, and putting on her straw hat with the cherry ribbons. In the small silk bag that held her money she placed the three gifts she had won, the ruby ring, the golden girdle, and the necklet of pearls, and fastened the bag inside her waist. In a wardrobe she found a cloak that would protect her from bad weather, and into this she slipped, and then, satisfied that she was ready for the exigencies of her journey, opened her door, and stole downstairs.

She suspected that Romsey had learned of the visits of Verney and the Earl from some of his servants, and so was careful to assure herself that no

one was about when she left the hall. The terrace and the park were empty. Hiding from the windows of the east wing, she ran over the dew-wet grass to the driveway. The birds were at their matins in the great trees, and their songs gave her courage as she hurried down the avenue, looking back now and then to guard against pursuit.

The great park-gates stood open, and Pamela turned her back on Cumnor, and took the highway that led to the neighboring village of Chantrey. The Surrey country was smiling at early day, the hedge-rows were not so high but that a traveler could look over them at the meadows and pasture-lands that lay beyond. Our traveler, however, paid little heed to them, for she was wondering if there was a coach that ran from the village of Chantrey in the direction of London, and at what time of day it passed through, and if she had money enough in her purse to pay for a seat to town.

Presently she remembered that she had had no breakfast, and began to consider whether she might not stop at a farmhouse and ask for food. But there were few houses thereabouts, and each time she neared one the highroad beckoned her on, and suggested that she should keep to it until she reached the village. She was strong, and determined, and so she pushed on, unfastening her cloak as the sun rose higher, and the exercise made her warm.

A man in a coarse blue smock came toward her

after a time, a shaggy collie trotting at his heels. The man had inquisitive eyes, and a humorous mouth, which gave him a pleasing appearance. He surveyed the young woman who was hastening along at such an early hour, and evidently recognizing that she was of the quality, pulled off his slouch hat.

"Good morning," said Pamela, affably. "It's a fine day to be abroad."

"Aye," agreed the man, "though there be herrin'-bone clouds to the west."

The collie came rubbing against Pamela's skirt, and she slowed up enough to stoop and pat his head.

"Come here, ye rogue," ordered the man, "doan't ye be disturbin' of a lady."

Pamela smiled, and stepped on, leaving man and collie standing in the road, looking after her with frankly curious eyes. She wondered if the man were a tenant of the Marquis, and thought it very probable, since that nobleman owned thousands of acres in this part of Surrey.

Her slippers were not meant for walking on a rough road, and before long she had to slow her pace and step more gingerly. She knew it was not very far to the village, and she had figured out that any stage bound Londonward would probably not be passing through there until later in the day. Soon she met a fine-looking man with silver-gray hair, who carried himself soldier-fashion, and like the man in the smock, his eyes showed his surprise to see such a

pretty woman, dressed so modishly, on the road alone. The girl liked his appearance, and nodded in a friendly way as he uncovered his head. "Is there a coach for London passes through the village?" she inquired eagerly.

"Somewheres about noontime," he answered, "from the Stag and Hounds."

"Thank you kindly," she said, and was on again, leaving a glow in his eyes at the sight of such a lovely face.

The slippers began to chafe atrociously now, and so, assuring herself that no one was within sight, she sat down on the bank at the roadside, and taking them off, rubbed her heels and the soles of her bruised feet. She rested a few minutes before she started on, and then walked cautiously, since she had plenty of time if the coach did not leave the inn until noon.

The highway brought her to a height from which she could see a cluster of houses lying about a mile away, her destination, the little town of Chantrey. Below her the road forked beyond a clump of trees, one line meeting the yellow ribbon of a lane that cut through the green fields to her right.

Throwing her cloak more loosely back from her shoulders, for the day had grown warm by this time, she walked down the hill, and followed the road through the trees. At the fork just beyond stood a signpost, one arm pointing to the village, and one in-

dicating what might be found along the lane. She stopped to look at the signs, and as she did so she heard hoofbeats in the highway behind her.

Turning quickly, she discovered that a chaise was being driven rapidly down the road. She had no chance to hide in that open place, and so simply stepped to one side and waited. The chaise slackened its speed as it drew up with her, and she found Gregory, the major-domo of Cumnor, holding the reins. He touched his hat to her with becoming deference.

"I ask your pardon, my lady," he said, "but the Marquis sent me out to fetch you back. When he found you had left so early he was very much disturbed, and declared that he had particularly wanted to have you at the Castle to-day. He bade me try to find you, and ask you to drive back in the chaise."

"I don't intend to go back, Gregory. You may tell Lord Romsey so." Nothing could have been more decided than this answer.

"But, my lady—" began Gregory, the urgency of his errand requiring him to argue.

"I've made up my mind, and wouldn't change it if he sent all his servants after me, or even came himself."

"He rode out straightway to find you," said the man, "but thinking it most likely you had taken the north road to Holker Hall, as Lord Dorset was a friend of yours, he rode that way."

The girl gave Gregory a look full of the most direct appeal. "And when he comes back won't you try to make him give over following me?" she begged.

"He's a very determined man, is his lordship," said Gregory, "and that's a mild word for him."

"And I'm a very determined woman," returned the girl, defiantly. "I will not go back, and he ought to understand that I mean it."

"His lordship only understands what he's a mind to," suggested Gregory, insinuatingly.

The runaway stamped her foot, and then was sorry she had done so. "I am free, and mean to stay so," she declared. "He can make what he likes of that. Goodbye." And she turned and walked on toward the village.

"He's a very determined man, my lady," Gregory repeated after her; but she paid no further attention to him, and in a minute heard the wheels of his chaise turning in the road. When she did look back he had already disappeared beyond the trees.

Although her slippers pinched her feet badly, the girl hurried on, for now she knew that Romsey was aware of her flight, and she had no wish to meet him. Free though she was, he was a great nobleman, and the people of village and countryside would all stand in fear of him, and not be over-eager to help her in any dispute that might arise between them.

But when she had gone half the distance named by

the signpost she slackened her speed. Soft grass at the edge of the highroad invited her to rest for a few minutes, and ease her ankles. She sat down, and took off the good-looking, but tight, slippers; and gave a sigh of satisfaction. She folded her cloak into a pillow, and cushioned her head upon it, and looked up at the soft-sailing clouds in the summer sky, meaning to allow herself a very short rest before making the final dash to the village.

The voice of a man singing made her sit up hurriedly. Someone was coming down the road in the same direction she had been taking, and was giving expression to his love of music in a voice that was strong, even if not consistently on the key.

She thrust her tired feet into her slippers, and caught up her cloak hurriedly. The singer had come into sight, proving to be a young man with a broad, weather-tanned face, and a big body. His tight jacket showed a pair of muscular shoulders. In one hand he swung a wide-brimmed hat, while the other grasped the end of a stick that rested across his shoulder and dangled a bundle tied in a blue handkerchief behind his back.

This stranger caught sight of the girl sitting in the grass, and stopped singing. As if intending to be polite, and to avoid a stare, he looked across the meadow on the other side of the road; but somehow his eyes would irresistibly come back to the young woman. Meantime she was admiring his broad-toed

boots, and thinking how comfortable his toes must feel in them.

He came opposite, and was about marching past, when temptation overpowered him. "Might I do anything for you?" he inquired, bluntly, and yet quite respectfully, and at the same time stopped in front of her.

The young man's clear blue eyes had an honest look, and so she decided had everything about him, from his great shock of brown hair to those enviable boots. Here was a creature of healthy living and good-nature, and one evidently intended to be trusted.

"I'm bound for the village of Chantrey," she said. "It isn't far now; but I've come some distance in these slippers that weren't made for walking, and I haven't had anything to eat this morning."

Such a recital, delivered as it was by a young woman of so many charms, would have touched the heart of the sternest anchorite. This big-limbed fellow succumbed at once. "Maybe I can help you then," said he, "for I'm going to Chantrey too; and I've bread and cheese in this bundle on my staff. Will you eat some of it?"

"I'd eat anything," she answered eagerly, with a little laugh.

The man straightway swung the bundle from his shoulder to the grass, undid the knotted handkerchief, and produced a loaf of white bread and a large piece of Cheshire cheese, wrapped in a brown

paper. "It's not very fine fare for a lady," he said, apologetically, "but it's right helpful when a body's hungry." He spread out the handkerchief beside her, and set the bread and cheese upon it.

By now she was ravenously hungry, and she broke off a big piece of the loaf and of the cheese, and ate as if she had never tasted better fare. The man sat down in the grass near her, and watched her with the greatest admiration.

When she had eased her hunger she brushed the crumbs away, and tying up what was left of the bread and cheese in the handkerchief, handed it back to him. "I believe you've saved my life," she said, smiling at him. "Now I must hurry to the village."

"Would you let me go along with you?" he asked boldly.

She nodded in quick decision. "I must catch the stage to London," she explained, and in a glance decided to confide her situation. "I might meet with a man who'd try to keep me from going; and if I did I'd be glad of someone's help."

The young man's broad face beamed at this sign of trust in him. "I can handle any man!" he declared stoutly. "Don't you be afraid!" Then he tied the bundle to the end of his staff, and held out his hand to help her to rise.

She stood up in the road beside him. "I do feel so much better now," she said, and as she started to walk she added, "This man is a very great person,

the Marquis of Romsey in fact; and he might well be in a frightful temper."

"Leave him to me," said her new friend confidently. "I be not afraid of anyone, Marquis or other." Then, as if he feared that he might seem over-presuming, he added, "Leastwise I be not afraid of a nobleman, if he's rude with a lady."

His ingenuous words amused the girl, and she studied her companion out of the corner of her eye. "I think you might be able to handle a dozen men; you look so big and strong. You're not town-bred."

"Not I," he answered, shaking his head. "My name's Tom Jellett, and folks call me the Byberry Boy. I've fought a score of battles in the ring. Last month I knocked out the Bombardier at Shrewsbury Fair." Here his modesty checked him. "But a lady won't care to hearken to a prize-fighter."

"Sooner than to some fine gentlemen," she answered.

"Would this one do you harm?" he asked, incredulously.

"The harm of trying to force me to marry him, though I hate everything about him," she burst out, as if in relief to tell her tale to someone.

"Would he so!" exclaimed the young man. "He must be monstrous evil to force a lady to such a thing as that!"

"Don't let's talk about him," she said perversely. "Tell me of your battle at Shrewsbury Fair."

So Tom Jellett described that historic encounter, softening the details that they might not shock a lady's ears. His candid, straightforward manner of speech was very engaging; and his story helped to make the girl forget her tight slippers until they reached the outlying houses of the little village.

Chantrey was a small place, with the highroad for its single thoroughfare. Midway of the rows of houses stood the inn, the Stag and Hounds, a low, wide building, with a great red sign, bearing a picture of a stag-hunt done in yellow, hanging over the entrance to the court inside.

The inn was built in the form of a square about this court, and in front of the entrance was a fine stretch of greensward, shaded by an old gigantic maple. The two travelers came to the entrance, and looked into the inner court beyond. A boy, with a serving apron tied about his waist, came forward at sight of them.

"When will the London coach leave for town?" the girl asked him.

"It ought to be here by noon," the lad answered.

"Then there's a little time to wait," said Jellett. "Yon's a comfortable-looking bench beneath that arbor," he added, pointing into the court. "Fetch two glasses of ale out there."

They walked under the arched entrance into the court. The arbor at the far side, shaded with grapevines, looked very attractive, and the girl

hurried over to it, and sat down on the bench with a sigh of relief. "I should be safe enough here," she said. "Oh, these slippers!" and she took them off, and rubbed her bruised ankles and heels.

"Safe and snug as can be!" agreed Jellett, sitting down. His face expressed more than satisfaction, it was filled with a beatific look of admiration for the young woman he had been allowed to succor so far.

X

OVERSEEN FROM AN ARBOR

THE Stag and Hounds at Chantrey was ordinarily a very quiet place, with the arrival of the coach for London bound north at noon, and of the coach from London bound south about five in the afternoon, for its chief excitements. The men of Chantrey gathered in the ample bar-room on winter nights, and in the court or under the giant maple in summer, when the day's work was done. There was a private inn parlor, much used by visitors, on the right side of the house, just beyond the bar, and a door opened from this room into the court.

The noonday sun was pleasantly tempered by the grapevines that clambered over the trellised arbor where the girl from Pump Lane and the prize-fighter sat. The waiter had brought them two glasses of home-brewed ale, and they were much refreshed and very comfortable. The fugitive had thrust her stockinged feet into her slippers again, and was making sure that her hair was in proper trim under her wide straw hat. "It seems a week since I looked in my glass this morning," she confessed, "and I can't

think how I must look." She touched a tiny handkerchief to her cheeks. "You must tell me if anything's amiss."

The Byberry Boy's red-brown face actually flushed at the suggestion. "There's an ant crawling over your skirt," he said, and leaning forward, flicked the intruder away with his finger.

"Thank you. And is that all that's the matter?"

He nodded very positively.

"Dear me," said the girl. "How blind men are! These ribbons are crumpled and untied." She smoothed them out as best she could and fastened them in a bow beneath her chin.

"I hope," she said, after a pause, "I'm not disturbing your journey. I feel quite safe now."

"I make no plans," he answered, "I can't change in a twinkle."

The quiet of noon had settled on the inn-court, given over to a few rustling pigeons, and the girl, having done what she could to remedy her appearance, fell into a lazy reverie. Bit by bit she felt she was winning back her old assurance of spirit as a girl of London.

As they sat shielded by the vines a maid came through the doorway that led from the inn-parlor. She was small and pretty, doubtless the barmaid, and as she pretended to run into the court she looked back over her shoulder at a dapper man who was close behind her.

"Not so fast, little one!" exclaimed this man; and at the sound of his voice the girl from Pump Lane sat up and pulled the vines aside enough to look out. She saw the maid run part way across the court, and the man overtake her.

"Why fly so fast, my dear?" said the pursuer. "Surely there's no harm in one little kiss."

The maid hid her saucy face with her bare arm, but stood still, waiting. The man caught her about the waist, and drawing her sheltering arm away, stooped and kissed her. "Come, be kind," he urged, "and give me a kiss to show there's no ill-will." The little maid, standing on tiptoe, did as he asked. "There," she said, "but I never kissed a gentleman before."

"It's all the sweeter for that," the gallant assured her, "and if any other gentleman begs a kiss, you box his ears for him."

"Oh, mercy me," said the maid, glancing about, "there's someone in the arbor! I can see them through the vines." And she turned and ran back into the house.

The gentleman, however, was not so much perturbed. Instead of retreating, he walked to the open front of the shelter and looked in. But instantly he turned brick-red. "My word!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

The girl in the arbor laughed, and the more she laughed the redder grew the gentleman's cheeks. "I

protest, Sally," he began, "I only did it on a wager. Those other two—"

"No, no, Jack," she interrupted, "don't protest. You wanted the kiss, and you got it. You ought to be satisfied."

But the gentleman looked anything but that, and stood digging his heel in the turf like a truant schoolboy. "I'm afraid you'll think me very inconstant," he said. "The truth is—"

"That the girl tempted you; oh, I saw her do it. So what Eve said of the snake, men say of women." Then her face grew provokingly earnest. "There is no such thing as constancy in the world, and I must take all men's speeches with a grain of salt." She looked down at her slipper. "I'm going back to town, to trust in myself and no one else."

"The monster drove you away?" said Sir John.

"I left of my own free will." Pride shone in her eyes. "That's how I came, and that's how I'm going. I did what I agreed to, and now I'm free again. Oh, freedom is a great thing, Jack!" She looked so finely self-reliant that Sir John's heart sank. He caught the eyes of the big man beside her glowing with admiration. He stopped twisting his heel, and stood straighter, as if copying her own change of manner.

"You are very wonderful indeed," he said, "and I don't know but that freedom does suit you best. There's something of Diana in you."

But lest he should grow too serious she smiled quickly and answered, "Don't press your words too far, Jack. Second thoughts are best nowadays, and when we meet at Vauxhall we'll both be wiser. Do you know I'm just beginning to find my real self again?"

"You never lost it," he said. "You carry it, and all other charms always with you;" and, realizing that she had no further need of him at present and that the moment was propitious for his departure he bowed and went back across the court to the bar-room door.

The girl watched him go, her face a study, and when the court was quiet again she turned to the silent man at her side. "Are we all like that—bees sipping honey? Does every woman love flattery? And every man love a pretty face?"

The broad-shouldered youth rubbed his chin with the back of one big hand. "I know little of women, but it be right hard for a man to overlook a pretty maid," he said, thoughtfully. "It do seem likely maids were made pretty for that very reason."

"You may be right," she assented; "and yet—it makes human kind a very fickle lot."

"Was he an old friend of yours?" Jellett inquired.

"Yes, I'd call him that," she answered with a smile. "In town they think him a very clever man. But didn't he look put about when he found us here? I wonder now if he'd really laid a wager, or did he make that up as quick as he saw me?"

As she was pondering this two other men came out from the door of the inn-parlor. They were arguing, and their voices could be heard across the court. One, who was tall and spare, held out his left hand, and kept punctuating his remarks by jabbing at his palm with the fingers of his right, while the other, who was short and stout, bobbed his head up and down. "We can do nothing this way," said the first. "Jack and you and I have fought it out over the table. As long as we're all three here together, we might as well all three be in town. But no two will go, and leave the other the field. Now it's pleasant enough to sup and drink here, but kitchens and cellars are far better in London."

"A deuced deal better," agreed the stout one, bobbing his head.

"Therefore I've a sporting plan to propose," continued the first speaker. "We two toss a sovereign, you calling the turn, and the one who wins shall do the same thing with Jack Gorham; it being agreed that the two losers shall leave the field to the winner, until Sally goes back to town. Otherwise we'll only dog each other's heels here, and none's the better off."

The stout man bobbed again. "This way none's the better off," he repeated.

"Then it's agreed," said the taller; and he put his hand in his waistcoat pocket and drew out a gold coin.

The other surveyed the coin very thoughtfully. "I choose the king's head," he decided.

"The head is yours," assented the tall man. "Now here it goes." He held the sovereign between thumb and forefinger, and spun it up into the air.

A laugh caught both men's attention as the coin fell, and they looked away from it to the arbor. At the same moment Sally stepped out from behind the vines, and running forward, put her foot over the sovereign. "Is this the way you deal with my favor?" she cried. "Toss a coin to settle who's to see me? Why, in that case I am certain I don't care to see any of you."

Verney was the first of the disconcerted men to find his tongue. "I assure you," he said, in his most impressive manner, "we had no thought of any disrespect;—but three men who stick so close together as we can get nowhere at all."

"We'd no notion you were in earshot," said the Earl, floundering badly.

"Oh! Then you didn't intend I should hear of the plan, my lord?" she exclaimed, her eyes finding they could not keep from mocking him.

The Earl perceived his blunder, and looked more foolish than ever, so foolish that Sally had to relent a little. "It makes no difference," she said, "for I've left Cumnor, and am taking the coach to town."

Jellett had followed her out of the arbor, and now stood watching, like a spectator at a play.

"But what of Romsey?" asked Verney; and the Earl exclaimed, "How did he take the trick?"

"I've washed my hands of him," said Sally, "and he may take the trick in any way he pleases. I've played my part till the curtain dropped, and don't desire an encore. I'm famished for my old friends in the Lane," and she added wickedly, "as hungry as some gentlemen I know of for London kitchens and cellars."

Verney looked at the man who stood behind Sally, and a frown wrinkled his brow. "You've come out victorious, I must admit," said he. "Your skill is past belief; you twist my sex about your little finger."

But she would not explain Jellett's presence, though she read the curiosity in Verney's eyes. "You're very flattering, I'm sure," she said, "but when your sex fall to arguing it's time mine took to action." She lifted her foot from the sovereign, and stooped to pick it up. "It was the king's head," she said, and handed the coin to the Earl. "Come to see me in London, it's your due."

Then Sally nodded her head at the two of them, and shook her finger admonishingly. "Never debate the way to a woman's favor," she said. "Take the field and hold it; the straightest way is best, cross hedges and all." She held out a hand to each of them, for Sally could never be severe for long. "You're both forgiven, my friends," she assured them. "Come

and learn wisdom from the player-folk at Drury Lane."

Each man kissed the hand she gave him, and withdrew into the inn, feeling that the mysterious man, standing back of Sally, had displaced them for the time at least.

"You've seen much in a half-hour, haven't you, Tom Jellett?" she said, turning to him, amusement in her face. "What do you think of it all?"

Before he could answer a coach-horn sounded to the south. "At last!" she cried, "there it comes!" She held out her hand. "Good-bye, and thank you ever so much!"

He touched her hand with his big fingers. "Good-bye," he said, soberly.

"You are a faithful fellow. Good luck in all your battles!" With that she hurried across to the little entrance that opened on the highroad.

Jellett stood still a moment, his eyes as wistfully hungry as those of a deserted dog. Then the long tally-ho sounded again, and he walked slowly after her to get his last glimpse of his flying goddess.

XI

THE ENCOUNTER AT THE INN

THE coach had come to a stop before the Stag and Hounds, the driver was refreshing himself with a vast tankard of ale, offered to him by the serving-boy who had climbed up and stood balanced on the near front wheel; the postilion had run to a trough by the roadside and was filling a bucket with water for his horses, and two passengers, a mild-faced man and a woman with inquisitive eyes, presented their heads at the coach-window for a view of Chantrey.

"A deuced pretty girl that, my dear," said the man in the coach, and he twisted his neck a little more to get a better view of Sally.

"I hope she's not going to crowd herself in here," said the woman.

"She has the look of town about her," the man observed. "Those slippers now—"

"Her color's too high," sniffed the woman, "country color."

"She's coming over here," said the man.

So she was—when something stopped her. A clat-

ter of hoofs right at hand, and she turned a startled look backward. She stood still, hesitating whether to fly to the coach or back to the inn, and on the instant a horseman, rudely curbing his beast, placed himself in the road before her. He looked as ominous as a thunder-cloud, and his right hand shot out at her. "So you're here!" he cried. "Trying to escape from me!"

Color swept her face, but she did not flinch from his glance.

"Come here to me," he ordered, "and I'll carry you back to Cumnor."

"I am not going back," she said. "Gregory should have told you."

Romsey's hand fell with a blow on his horse's neck. "You are coming back," he said. "You are mine to do with."

"No, I am free from you now," she answered positively, "as free as any girl in England."

The dark man sprang down to the road, riding-crop caught in his hand. "In England a ward belongs to her guardian," he declared, walking across the greensward toward her. "You are very ignorant of the laws."

She did not budge before him. "Happily I'm not your ward, my lord," she said, and held up her hand to stay him. "I'm not the Lady Pamela Vauclain; she ran away to marry Mr. Charles Tree; I'm Sally Temple, actress at Drury Lane."

Romsey stopped, caught in a sea of surprise. His black eyes stared, and his brows worked up and down. "How's that?" he demanded. "Not my cousin, not Pamela?"

"Not at all, my lord; I played her part because she asked me to."

He stared, while the flushes ebbed and flowed in her defiant face. In the silence that followed his hand clutched his riding-crop tighter and his eyes grew more and more like steel points. As for Sally, she was the very picture of rebellious beauty, desirable of all men.

"Very good," he said in a more controlled tone, "whether you are Pam or a girl of the London streets, I will have you. You shall be my wife. The parson is waiting at Cumnor to marry us, and it makes no difference what your name may be. Come," and he stepped forward to lay his hand on her arm.

"Never!" she cried, falling back before him. "You wouldn't dare do such a thing!"

"I'd dare do anything!" he retorted. "You'd best give in to me."

A big fellow who stood in the entrance to the court watching them stepped out, and came up to Sally. His face was quiet, but his blue eyes had a very determined look. "Keep your hands from her," he said. "She be free, and there's an end of it."

"Get away," snarled Romsey, "this is none of your concern."

"Aye, but it be though," said Jellett.

Romsey gave him a look fit to wither most men, black and furious. "You fool," he snapped, "I'm the Marquis of Romsey; mind your manners."

"I don't care if you be the King," said Jellett, "the lady says she'll have naught to do with you."

"And I say get away!" roared Romsey, and he brought the riding-crop down across Jellett's shoulder.

The other man's hands caught the crop, wrenched it away, and broke it over his knee. "I don't want to harm you," he said, "for I be the Byberry Boy, and a fighter by trade."

"Be the Devil," snapped Romsey, "but stand away from here!" He turned to Sally, and thrust out his arms to catch her.

Jellett's great first caught him on the chest and hurled him backward. "Have you no care for a girl?" Jellett cried. "Then I'll keep her safe from you!"

Romsey steadied himself, his face pale with raging. "By God, I will deal with you!" he swore. He ran in on the other, and his right arm, like a flail, struck Jellett's jaw and cheek.

Sally had sprung to safety, frightened at the tempest she had started. Coachman, postilion, passengers, inn-keeper, pot-boy, barmaid, three gentlemen drawn from their parlor by the noise, all looked on amazed at sight of the Marquis of Romsey fight-

ing a pugilist with his bare fists. "He has grit," muttered Sir John. "Damme, if the beast hasn't got grit!"

Romsey needed grit, for he had neither the weight nor the skill of Tom Jellett. And Jellett soon saw that his enemy had courage of a far different order than that of most of the fighters by trade. His enemy meant to finish him forthwith, and went at it hammer and tongs.

Blood in his eye, his face set like a vise, Romsey stood to his man, and battered his fists against that wall of sinew. His first blow left a red streak on Jellett's cheek, and his third caught a corner of the man's mouth. After that knuckles met wrist or forearm till knuckles bled and stained whatever they hit.

Tom Jellett was slow to fight, but this was no mincing matter, he soon perceived. The man was dangerous, and could not be warded off continually. Evidently he meant to knock Jellett out, and one of those ramrod blows, caught properly on the chin, would do the business. By a sudden feint and a quick uppercut with his long arm Romsey reached his man's ear and set it painfully buzzing; and thereupon Jellett waded into the work that lay before him.

"By God, but it's a real mill!" Sir John muttered to Verney, where they stood back by the inn wall. "The Marquis hits the harder!"

"Watch the other beggar now," Verney answered. "What a neck and shoulders!"

Jellett's tight jacket was burst as if it had been paper, and his great muscled arms showed through the rents. His head was set very firmly on his shoulders, and now he lowered it to protect his jaw. His feet had been planted firm and wide apart, but he shifted his footing quickly and began to spring back and forth, while his whole body moved with a supple elasticity. Of this Romsey had little; he sprang when he had the chance, jerked this way or that as he had need to dodge, but kept perpetually going, stinging like a wasp that darts continually in and out. He was the fighting spirit incarnate, his eyes wide with passion.

Jellett's left arm was poised, his right a bulwark across chest and chin, and his blue eyes quick and wary. His left hand struck Romsey's cheek, and jabbed at his jaw; the blood came running and was smeared over his face. The Marquis snarled like a hurt wolf-hound, and flung himself on Jellett as if to drag down his guard and find his throat, but the pugilist stood him off and tore his own arms free, and hit Romsey over one eye and sent him staggering back. "Enough?" Jellett cried in question; but the dark man only spat the blood from his cut lip and came back at him with both fists, totally disregarding the shielding of his head.

Even science has its loopholes, and Romsey reached his enemy's face with a blow that shook Jellett's poise. Another crash of those bruised and bleeding

knuckles ripped the skin from Jellett's jaw. The prize-fighter drew back his head, then lunged it forward, and body, shoulders and arms took up the battle and worked together as they had not yet worked. Crash went a hook from the left fist, crash came another on the same tender spot. Romsey gave way, caught his balance, flung out his arm. Crash came Jellett's left fist on his mouth, and then the right, that had waited the crucial point, sped to Romsey's chin, and caught it fairly. The Marquis spun sideways and fell on the grass, his arms flung out across it.

Jellett stood above him, the wild, fighting look fading from his face, and its usual calm returning. He was not a pretty sight, jaw and cheeks and forehead cut and bloody, hands red, and his jacket split in tatters, but he was a fine figure of triumphant bone and sinew, and his audience could at least appreciate that.

As for Romsey—he lay as if broken and discarded on the green turf, one eye blackened, and his face streaked and patched with blood. He was totally spent, that last whirlwind rush of the prize-fighter had battered all resistance out of him. His right arm moved as if to ease his shoulder, but he made no movement to rise.

"I told you who I be," said Jellett, "but you would have it so. There's a rare lot o' fighting spirit in you." He stepped back, and wiped his own face and

hands with a torn sleeve of his jacket. Then he turned to look at Sally, who stood by the coach-door. "There be no real harm done. It be only cuts and bruises and a little blood," he said reassuringly.

In the meantime the inn-keeper and the pot-boy drew a little nearer, peering curiously at the man on the grass. Romsey moved as if he meant to sit up. "Fetch hot water for his lordship," the inn-keeper ordered the boy, and the lad scurried away.

The coachman reluctantly turned back to his business. "Time we were off," he proclaimed. The guard set horn to lips and blew a fanfare, the postilion leaped to his saddle. Sally opened the coach-door and stepped in, and Jellett, running across the grass, mounted after her. "I mean to see you safe now," he declared, and pushed past the other two passengers, who sat silent, still amazed at the strange scene they had witnessed.

The horses swung out into the road under the driver's whip. Sally looked through the window and saw Romsey get to his feet. She had a glimpse of him turning to look at her, she caught the baffled gleam in his wild eyes—she quivered suddenly and sat back in her corner. "Oh, what a terrible man!" she murmured, and shut her eyes to block out the picture.

"Aye, and a terrible fighter, too!" said Jellett, who had overheard.

"Don't speak of him again!" she commanded. "I'm done with him at last!"

THE HEART OF SALLY TEMPLE

PART II

XII

THE WIND IN PUMP LANE

IT was a winter night in Pump Lane. The street was clogged with snow that had been trampled into slush where men walked, but that still showed a white crust under windows and in unused places. The wind was busy, whistling and singing, and making sport of whatever came in its way. The air was cold, of that quality that pries between the joints, and bids noses and ears beg for mercy. Altogether it was a much pleasanter night on which to be at home than abroad, and Pump Lane people showed their wisdom. The wind looked in at one window after another, and by candlelight saw snug, domestic pictures.

Mistress Kilgore was stitching a new bodice, and lecturing her husband. The wind had seen that picture many times before, and rattling the casement to warn the couple that he was about, crossed the Lane to a window on the opposite side. Here was something for him to tarry over.

The small, raftered room was lighted by a pair of candles that stood on a center-table. A young man

sat with his elbows on the board, his chin propped in his hands. On the far side of the table a girl, clad in a warm-looking brown dress, lounged in a chair. In the shadowy background a gray-haired woman was dozing, her hands folded in her lap.

"Tom comes down the Lane," the girl was saying, "and no more than steps into the Court, when the boys open fire. One snowball knocked off his hat, and another spattered his nose. Then they saw who it was, and took to their heels;—all but little lame Walt Butcher. He fell on his knees, and cried, 'Oh, Mr. Jellett, I didn't mean to do it!' But Tom was only laughing. 'Why, those were love-taps,' he said. 'The Bombardier hit harder. Here, my lad, I'll show you how to throw;' and he rolled up a snowball, and threw it so it knocked the bear on the old inn's sign half off. Walt told me about it, his eyes as big as platters."

"He's almighty strong," said Gilbert, "and just as good-natured."

"I'm glad you like him," said Sally; "because I like him too."

"I liked him first for bringing you home from Surrey last summer."

"Yes, he was very kind then," agreed Sally. Her face grew reminiscent. "I sometimes wonder what you would have thought of that strange man, Gilly. I can picture you two measuring each other."

"The Marquis wouldn't waste much time on the likes of me," suggested Gilbert.

"Maybe not. But one never could tell just what he would do—he wasn't like our town-bred gentlemen."

"What's the difference?"

"Something;—I can't tell. It may be just a woman's instinct that jumps at such things."

"Instinct ought to say he'd make anybody near him wretched," asserted Gilbert very positively.

"Oh, yes," agreed Sally, readily; "he'd surely do that."

There came a rapping at the street door, and Sally went and opened it. The wind burst in, and with it a big, broad-shouldered man. "Good-evening, Sally. Will you give me shelter?" he inquired.

"If you be quick, Tom." She pushed the door shut behind him.

The big man threw his cloak and hat on a settle, and walked into the living-room. He nodded familiarly to Gilbert, and smiled at Mrs. Stanes, who had opened her eyes and sat up. That hard-working woman forthwith took his arrival as an opportunity to go upstairs to bed.

The Byberry Boy stood with his hands behind his back, and it seemed as if his shadow covered almost an entire wall of the room.

"How go things, Gilly?" said he. "It be bad weather for you to get to work."

"So it is, Tom," said the lame youth. "But I win through the day thinking of the evening, for now it's winter, Sally's more at home."

"And that's a good thing to think of," agreed Jellett, looking at the girl, who had taken her former seat on the other side of the table.

"Nonsense!" declared Sally. "Gilly's always got his books, whether I'm here or not."

"So he has," assented Jellett. "He be lucky any way you take it. I wish I was a scholar. Won't you read us more about that shipwrecked fellow, Robinson Crusoe?"

After a proper urging Gilbert got the book and read aloud, transporting the three to that magic isle of the Pacific. The wind, which had doubtless heard the tale before, rattled the casement, and went on about his business.

In Pump Court, at the end of the Lane, stood a smithy, with a harness-shop attached. The wind, whistling down the great chimney, saw an old wrinkled man sitting close to the fire, binding a saddle. A knock rang on the door, and the harness-maker got up and opened it a crack. A tall man stood outside, muffled up to the ears, and as the door opened he thrust himself in, bringing snow on his heavy boots.

"Are you the smith?" the new arrival demanded, and he glanced appraisingly about the shadowy fire-lighted place.

"Yes," answered the old man, "Oliver Pipe, at your service."

"Go back to your stool, where it's warm," said the other. "Bur-r-r, but this London is a dank hole." He moved over to the hearth, and stretched out his hands above the blazing wood.

"You might be a foreigner?" queried Pipe, humoring his visitor by sitting down on the stool.

The other paid no heed to the question, but appeared to be stating his thoughts aloud. "You all live close enough together here," said he, his back to the smith, "for warmth and company, most like."

"Oh aye, we rub shoulders close in the Court and Lane, as neighborly as dogs in a kennel."

The other, his hands now somewhat warmed, turned about, and by the flickering light the smith saw a spare, clean-shaven face, the line of a scar cutting across the upper lip, and a pair of deep black eyes. "You live and work alone here, Mr. Pipe?" the man asked.

The smith, his curiosity rising with each interrogation, scratched his chin with a forefinger. "I have a boy come in to tend the bellows, and help out."

"You should have a man. Business would be brisker."

"It might," said the other, dubiously, "but there be no man would take what I could give."

"Hark you now," said his visitor, "I'm strong, and quick at learning. I'm a stranger in London, with a

little money. I'll buy a share in your business, you to give me a place and shelter here."

Pipe's face showed his astonishment. "Why, my good man—" he began.

But the other interrupted. "You don't know me; and I might be Satan himself. Very good; but you could put up with the devil for a month, if properly paid for it, eh? Sell me half your trade at forty shillings a month, and if all's well at the month's end we can settle for the next."

The smith stared, and scratched his chin, and considered. The offer was very good, and there was no doubt but that he needed a young man at the anvil. He cast a reflective eye over the stranger. The man stood tall and firm; he looked as if he had the making of a good smith in him.

"Is it agreed, Mr. Pipe?" the man pressed him.

"Aye, for a month," Pipe answered cautiously.

"Then here's half the sum in advance, as earnest." The man took a purse from his inner coat pocket, and counted out some coins. He tendered these to the smith, who counted them over, and dropped them into a leather pouch that hung at his belt. Then the other, who was now thoroughly warmed, took off his hat and heavy outer coat, and laid them on a bench. He was clad in a suit of coarse brown weave, such as might be had at any clothing-shop in Cheapside.

"What may be your name?" asked Pipe.

"Conrad Grote," said the other.

The smith chuckled. "There be no accounting for tastes, friend Grote," he remarked, "but you do seem a strange man—with money in your purse—and turning smith."

"I haven't much of it in my purse," said Grote, "and need to put more there. I know what I'm about."

"No doubt, no doubt," agreed Pipe readily. "You don't look like a fool."

The smith showed his new assistant up to a cubby-hole under the roof, and bade him make it his home. The cold came in through the cracks, and the bed was only a pallet of straw. Grote shivered a little as he looked through his tiny window at the mixture of chimney-pots and jutting gables. No wonder the houses huddled close together in such a cold place as this.

Almost all of the Court and Lane were asleep by now, and the wind found little to entertain him. His singing was for his own ears until he went back to the house opposite Mistress Kilgore's. There Gilbert, in his bedroom at the rear, heard him, and stuffed an old hat tighter in a broken window-pane. The clerk had finished his reading and left the other two, so that he might be fresh for his work on the morrow.

Downstairs the Byberry Boy was looking earnestly at Sally Temple. "There be no fights around here, and work in the butcher's shop is overdull," said he.

"You know why I came to London town, Sally. I'm staying just for you. I'd make a match to fight the Yorkshire Giant if so be it that would please you."

"It wouldn't please me so very much," she answered, "to have your eyes blacked, or your teeth knocked out."

"What would, then?" he demanded.

She put her hands back of her head, and sighed. "You're a right good man, Tom; but you must wait a little."

"Until some better man comes along?"

"No, not that. But until I know myself surer, Tom; until I feel that it couldn't be any other man but you."

"It's hard, Sally," said the young man, "to sit and wait for such a matter as that."

"Aren't you good at waiting?" she asked, her eyes studying his broad, candid face.

"When I fought the Bombardier I waited so long my friends were for going home. I let him do the leading till he thought I was no better than a bag o' meal. He hit out regardless, and I got him—oh yes, I got him, Sally." He looked fondly at his right fist and forearm, which had instinctively stiffened as for battle.

Sally regarded him in no unfriendly light. Here was a real man, no fashionable coxcomb, and if he had no greater supply of brains than were enough to make him a champion of the prize-ring, he had at

least two stout arms and hands that could safely shield a woman.

"You're prodigious strong, Tom," she admitted. "There's little doubt of that. I mind when first I saw you fight at Chantrey."

"So I be, Sally, so I be. But when it comes to a girl I'm gentle as a kitten."

"Little Walt Butcher thinks there's no one like you; and a boy makes a good judge."

Now it was Tom's turn to blush. "Take little Walt's judgment then," he pleaded. "I'm no great hand at words, but you can tell my feelings, Sally. They be as plain as daylight."

The girl, however, had not yet decided, for she could still view him critically, and that did not suffice her. "Wait," she said. "That's the only way for me, Tom."

In his patient and yet resolute face she thought she caught a glimpse of how he must have looked as he waited for the Bombardier in his great battle. He smiled as he bade her good-night, and picked up his cloak and hat. She opened the door enough for him to pass out, and then quickly shut it, and caught the latch in place.

She carried a candle up to her tiny room under the eaves. This place, garret as it was, and meagerly furnished, was dearer than ever to her after her grand apartments at Cumnor Castle. She was glad to know that Gilbert and Kate were sleeping near at

hand, and that when she woke in the morning she would look out on familiar roofs and houses.

Although she had not stayed a month at Cumnor Sally had received word from Sir John Gorham that by her aid Lady Pamela Tree had secured possession of the greater part of her estates, and that the Marquis had as yet given no signs of his displeasure. Sir John had also sent her the money he had promised if she would play that part, and this, together with the necklet of rich pearls, the ruby ring, and the girdle set with amethysts, had been put away as a nest-egg against hard times. Sally was a very popular actress, but Drury Lane Theatre was often closed in winter, and it was well for an actress to have something besides her salary there.

To-night she brushed her hair slowly, in spite of the cold. Was not Tom Jellett the man for her to marry? she wondered. He had brought her all the way from the village of Chantrey up to London, and had proved as thoughtful of her as a mother of a child. Since then he had stayed near the Lane, and she knew from his every word and action that the young giant rang true.

Thinking of Tom Jellett brought to her mind in contrast the three gentlemen who had sought her earlier. Though she had liked some qualities in each of them she had sent each on his way when each had come to urge his suit in London. Any one of the three could offer her a marriage more brilliant than a

Pump Lane girl, though she were a popular actress, should dare to dream of; but Sally was never caught by gilt or tinsel, save when she found it on the stage. She had dreams of a man who should possess all she had found to her liking in others, and something more besides; and she would not let her dreams go. Just what that something more might be she did not know; that was for the man to find out, she could not tell him. Tom Jellett had much; strength and truth and devotion were his, but not yet the power to compel her surrender.

As she shook out her long, lovely hair she wondered if she were too stubborn and captious. "People must give as well as receive," she said to herself. But she frowned over the thought as she got in bed, for she knew that it was far easier to advise than to act on the wisest counsel.

Soon she was asleep, and the wind, leaping and somersaulting by himself, sped away from that poor quarter of London to another section, where he could still find men and women performing antics for his benefit.

XIII

OLIVER PIPE'S NEW SMITH

WINTER relented somewhat after a few days, and one morning allowed the sun a brief chance at the Lane and Court. Oliver Pipe, whose face was like a rosy wrinkled apple, bade his assistant open the smithy door. It was likely horses would have to be shod such weather, and harness mended after the storm, and the ring of the hammer on anvil and the sight of the smith might catch customers' ears and eyes.

Pipe was pleased with his partner. The old man had cut a leather apron for him the morning after the stranger's arrival, and when Grote put it on he looked every inch the smith. He was quick to learn how to handle the tools, and he struck a hearty blow. Pipe felt that he had appraised the applicant correctly, and that the result of their bargain would all be to the credit side of the balance. They should get on famously to his thinking, the more so as Pipe was very fond of talking, and the apprentice had so far shown himself much more inclined to listen than to preach.

Grote opened the street door as he was bade, and stood there a minute, hands on his hips, breathing in the fresh air. Pipe joined him for the same purpose. The Court was partly aflood with the thaw. "Good weather for shoemakers," observed the smith, nodding toward some women, who, with skirts held well above their ankles, were paddling across the Court in the direction of the Market.

"No doubt," assented Grote.

A young woman came out of the Lane, and in her turn started to cross the Court. She was stoutly shod, and her lifted skirts showed a pair of trim ankles. A knitted woolen scarf hid her hair, and was wound about her throat, with its ends flung back over her shoulders, and on her arm she carried a market-basket.

Pipe glanced at his apprentice. "Aye, Oliver," said he, with a dry chuckle, "look your fill, for she be worth a man's looking. There's a woman would tempt Saint Anthony himself. If all the tales be true a dozen gentlemen have run their fine legs off after her, and got only a toss of her head for their pains. Now if I were a little younger! Saw you ever such a merry face, with a pretty figure to match? Speak up, man, if you ben't a stone."

"Who is she?" asked Grote.

"Sally Temple, to be sure; and she's known at t'other end of town as well as this. She's looking

over here. Good-morning to you, Sally." The smith waved his hand.

The girl called back, "Good-day to you, Mr. Pipe. The Court's afloat."

"So it be," the smith chuckled; "but it's too cold for barefoot wading."

The girl nodded, casting a glance at the man who stood beside Pipe. She saw a tall fellow, whose leather apron hung from his neck to his knees. He was clean-shaven, with black hair and eyes. But as he was looking directly at her, she turned her head and hurried past.

"Well," said Pipe, "is she pretty or no?"

Grote was still looking after the young woman, as she picked her way up the Court.

"Your tongue don't keep pace with your eyes, Conrad," snapped Pipe. "If I was your age—"

"Yes, she is all you say," assented Grote, as if under compulsion.

"You talk like a block of wood," complained the smith. "When most young men see Sally for the first time they run out of words to talk about her."

"Well, so have I," said Grote, smiling. "What more do you want?"

The smith cast a quizzing glance at his companion. The man puzzled him in a number of ways. When he chose to talk his voice was somewhat different from that of most townsfolk, lacking their blur, and being more clear and low. Now and again his as-

sistant's dark eyes would flash unexpectedly, and in so doing would disconcert the smith, who could see no cause for such an exhibition in the day's routine. Pipe would look up from his work sometimes, and find Grote brooding over the anvil or staring at the fire. "Strange eyes," thought the smith. "There's a caged look about them—most unusual."

For the first few days Pipe did almost all the talking that passed between the two. Grote and he had their simple meals together, labored in the smithy, and sat for a short time before the fire at night. Then Grote began to ask abrupt questions. He dug facts out of Pipe, facts about his own life and the lives of his neighbors, how they made their daily bread, who was their landlord, and such like. Once he had Pipe started on an interesting trail the smith would discourse volubly. Grote would listen to him, his face very intent, his fingers occasionally stroking his cheek. The smith gave him credit at least for being a listener in a thousand.

From time to time men and women of the neighborhood dropped in at the smithy or the shop on business. The apprentice served them ably, and if they felt inclined to chat—as most of them did—listened readily to all they had to say. But when, in their turn, they tried to learn his views, Grote grew silent. They left the smithy, and spread the news that old Oliver Pipe had a singular apprentice, a man who had dropped in from somewhere overnight, and who

would not tell a thing about himself. The girls of the quarter soon found excuses for errands. Grote made a good figure in his leather apron, but when it came to bandying words with them they found that he was as useless as the wooden bear above the tavern door. It seemed clear that the swains of the Court and Lane would have little to fear from this tall, mysterious stranger.

Late one afternoon, when the outdoor world had frozen up again, a thin, peaked-face young fellow entered the smithy, walking with a crutch. Pipe was out at the time, but Grote was hammering a red-hot horseshoe. The cripple sat down on a bench, and watched the workman finish his task. When Grote could attend to him the other handed over his crutch, and asked if the smith would fix a new iron ferrule to the peg at the bottom.

Grote applied himself to this work while the cripple studied him, noting each detail of his face and dress. Presently the observant customer asked, "How do you like this place?"

"Well enough," said Grote shortly.

"You haven't always been a smith?" There was as much assertion as question in the cripple's tone.

"No."

"If you don't mind my asking, what have you done before?"

Grote stopped his work, and took a good look at his questioner. He found unusual intelligence in the

cripple's face. "A number of things," he answered more readily, "and, like the common run of men, more ill than good when I come to think of it."

"You call that the lot of the common run?"

"Don't you?"

The cripple's face grew speculative. "I think, whatever we do, most of us wish to help more than to harm," he answered.

Grote rested his foot on the base of the anvil, leaning forward. "Do you mean in Pump Lane," he asked, "or in all the world?"

"I only know the world hereabouts, except by reading; but I think it true everywhere—except with the nobles, who see no need to help, and find more sport in harming."

"You do well to leave out the nobles," agreed Grote, and his tone was ironical. "They fatten on doing harm. You speak of reading; are you a scholar?"

"I have a little learning. I'm clerk by day, and reader by night and on Sundays," said the cripple.

"What's your name?" asked Grote.

"Gilbert Stanes."

"And you are a thinker?" mused Grote. "You read and think." He looked at Stanes as if he were regarding a most unusual creature.

"You see," said Stanes, "I'm lame;" as if that were his excuse.

"Yes, I see." Grote picked up the crutch, and

began to bend a new band of metal about the peg. Presently he said, "I read sometimes, and sometimes I think."

"You do?" said Stanes, eagerly. "Then you must come to see me, and talk about your reading and your thinking."

"But I've found out very little," objected Grote, "and I have to keep discarding what I've learned."

"You underrate yourself," suggested Stanes.

The smith looked up from the crutch, and his eyes gleamed, as Pipe had sometimes seen them. "I've never thought so," he said, "nor have other people." The gleam died away, and his lips curled, so that the scar on the upper one was twisted. "No, that's not one of my sins, Master Stanes," he added.

The cripple was intensely interested by this time; Oliver Pipe's apprentice was a rare character. But, though he tried to draw Grote out further, the man would not talk. He finished his work, and handed Stanes the crutch, pocketing his threepence. Only when Stanes said, "You will come to see me some night?" he nodded his head in assent.

His assistant's singular attitude in viewing all his neighbors from a distance furnished considerable surprise to Oliver Pipe. So far as he could observe, the man, although intelligent, showed no desire to mix with other men of the vicinity, and had not once, to the best of the old smith's knowledge, dropped in at the tap-room of the Bear and Staff. That was

where the unattached men—and some of the others—were wont to gather of a winter's evening, but Conrad Grote seemed to prefer to sit with Pipe in the smithy, and listen to his chatter. After a few weeks, however, Pipe began to be even more surprised by some of Grote's questions in regard to their neighbors. Apparently he had discovered facts about them that the smith, who had lived among them all his life, had never remarked, and had drawn conclusions that would never have occurred to Pipe. The latter also found that his assistant had bought a few books at a shop in Cheapside, and was reading them by candlelight in his own room. That the man should be able to read increased the smith's curiosity about him, but he was by this time so much interested in Grote's company, and so well satisfied with his workmanship, that he hesitated to seem too inquisitive for fear of giving offense.

One night after supper Grote took his hat and cloak from his peg in the smithy, and with a brief, "I'm going to make a visit," left Pipe to his own society. Down Pump Lane he went until he came to the small house opposite Mistress Kilgore's. Peering close, to identify the place from the descriptions he had gathered of it, he finally rapped on the door with his knuckles. It was opened by a gray-haired woman. "Does Gilbert Stanes live here?" inquired Grote. "Yes," said the woman. "He's within. Step into the room yon."

Grote walked into the living-room, where Stanes sat as usual by the table, a book open before him. The reader looked up, and seeing who his visitor was, smiled with pleasure. "Good-evening, Master Grote," said he, and bending forward, stretched out his hand.

The other took it in a firm grip, but silently.

"Throw off your cloak," said Gilbert. "Mother, this is Master Grote, Oliver Pipe's new smith."

Kate Stanes regarded the man, whose dark eyes seemed as quiet as her own.

Grote stood for a few moments while Gilbert talked, seeming to be preoccupied in observing every detail of the room—the low, raftered ceiling, the stained walls, the small casements, the heavy furnishings, the rough, uneven flooring. Finally he looked at the cripple, as if to say that he could attend to him now.

"Sit down," invited Gilbert, smiling. "Have you found more good or ill in the world since we last met?"

Grote shook his head. "My studies of the world are only in their infancy yet," said he, taking a chair near the clerk. "I thought to begin my search after wisdom here."

"But this is such a back-eddy," objected Gilbert, lightly.

"Who knows which are the eddies, and which the main currents; and who knows which will teach one more of truth?"

Gilbert's tongue was unleashed by that; and, with his head propped in his hands, and his big eyes speculative, he talked of what he had seen and thought in his quiet life. It was the meditation of a sincere philosopher, and as he looked at Grote from time to time he saw that the other man comprehended him. That meant a great deal to the little clerk, who met few men who could follow his thoughts rightly.

Presently there was a light step on the stairs, and some one came into the room back of Grote. Gilbert looked up. "Sally," said he, "I've a most interesting visitor to-night. It's Master Grote, who works for Oliver Pipe."

Grote stood up, and, turning, found himself facing a girl in a dark blue gown, whose hair was a cloud of soft reddish-gold. She looked at him with considerable interest, a smile in her eyes and on her lips. She nodded amiably as he bowed his greeting.

"I saw you standing with old Oliver at the smithy door a week or so ago," she said, good-humoredly.

"I remember, you were on your way to market," he answered.

Then, without more ado, Sally unfolded a bundle she was carrying in her hand, and, sitting down by the table, began to baste the lining in a skirt. Gilbert took up the conversation where her arrival had interrupted it, and Grote appeared to be focusing his attention on what the clerk said. His eyes, how-

ever, would occasionally stray to the girl, who sat apparently absorbed in her sewing. When Gilbert noticed this he smiled to himself, used as he was to seeing men's eyes drawn, magnet-wise, to his lovely young aunt.

Just before Grote left Sally took a greater interest in him. "Where do you come from?" she asked, as he rose from his seat near the table.

"I've lived in a great many places," he answered, evasively; "I'm a wanderer, like the famous Jew."

"And do you mean to stay at the smith's?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I can't tell. I'm seeking certain things, and I can't tell whether I'll find them here or not." Then he said good-night in his formal, rather abrupt manner.

When he had left Gilbert began to trace patterns on the table with his fingers. "It's clear," said he, "that Conrad Grote is a very curious man, and not much like the rest of us here."

"And what do you think of him, Gilly?" asked his aunt, laying her sewing in her lap, and looking at him.

"He's like a sword that hasn't been drawn from its scabbard for some time. It may be rusty, or it may be sharp. Did you notice his eyes, Sally?"

She nodded. "Oh, yes; eyes are most interesting."

"Some eyes seem to see back of things; his do, to my thinking. Others see only surfaces; like Tom Jellett's."

"I think I like Tom's kind best," she said. "They're always frank and true."

"And Tom's always tell you what they think of you; eh, Sally?" he teased. "Now you don't like Grote's, because they don't flatter you."

"Oh la, my dear, I didn't say that, did I? I might be able to make them if I chose." Sally rose to his bait with all her love of teasing Gilbert.

Gilbert shook his head, however, and resumed his tracing on the table. Sally's smile increased as she watched him; she had such a comfortable sense of security when her nephew was with her.

As for Conrad Grote, he went home, and stood a long time staring at the embers of the smithy fire. His thoughts were bitter, like purging medicine. Scenes of his life trooped before him, taunting him with mocking, spectral faces. His life had been wild and bad; a catalogue of ill-directed passions. Presently he sat down on the smithy bench, and gripped his head in his hands. He was young, and yet, like the wandering Jew, he felt æons old. He would have given the world to win back the clear vision of youth that he had thrown away so shamelessly. But there was a spirit in him that might possibly grow, that seemed the only chance left to him in his desperation, and he thought that here in this poor, struggling acre of Pump Lane lay its single opportunity to prosper. He concluded that it was here he must be tried, and made, or broken.

XIV

THE EVIL SEEDS IN CHEAPSIDE

THE ill wind possibly blew out of France, where Mr. Charles and Lady Pamela Tree were now sojourning, wondering—when they had time to wonder—how it was that the Marquis of Romsey had raised no hue and cry after them. But whether it blew from France, or from the trading cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam as some wise men averred, which in their turn had caught the wind from Italy, or the Levant, or Cyprus, was of small concern compared with what it carried, which was nothing less than the incubus known as the plague. It was in mid-winter that two men, both said to be French, died of it in a house at the upper end of Drury Lane. Through the cold weather it made little progress, but in early spring people began to whisper to each other that there was more than usual sickness in the parish of St. Giles. Rumor carried word of such matter quickly, and before long it was known that the distemper had found lodging in the midst of the city, in fact in Bearbinder Lane, near Stocks Market, which lay in the crowded parish of St. Mary Wool-

church. Thereupon well-to-do people began to close their houses, and travel into the country.

In Pump Lane, however, people went about their business, paying as little heed to the rumors as they could. They were busy loving, and laboring, and quarreling, and making up again in their usual old-fashioned way. The Byberry Boy came whistling down the street from his butcher's shop, sturdy and strong and merry, an outdoor creature, kept in the shackles of town by a girl's eyes and voice. Kate Stanes spun and tended house, and Gilbert limped to his clerk's stool and back, and thought inbetween-times of his talks with Grote, and of the conclusions they two were drawing from their reading. Meantime, Oliver Pipe had come to like his assistant so well that at the end of the month they renewed their bargain, and Grote's became a familiar face in the Lane. But it was a face that still puzzled the neighbors, for, although few had opportunity for intimate judging, all felt that the dark man was different from themselves.

As for Sally, she went on playing at Drury Lane whenever that theatre was open, but her friends found her a little more thoughtful nowadays, her face more apt to be serious, and her laughter not quite so quick to answer any jesting. Something of Gilbert's reflective mood was in her eyes at times, though usually when she was alone.

Then men began to observe houses in the heart

of the city marked with a red cross on their doors, and the toll of the plague's victims increased. The gentry in the west part of London hurriedly took to their coaches, and followed by servants on horses and in wagons, crowded the roads that led to purer air. The Earl of Dorset, now for some time despairing of winning Sally, went with friends to his seat in Yorkshire; Sir John Gorham joined his mother in Devon, and Lord Verney, accredited as an attaché to the court of Naples, set out to have a look at the flesh-pots of Italy. Red crosses gathered so thickly in Drury Lane that Mr. David Garrick closed the theatre, and went into enforced retirement.

In the crowded streets distress and superstition and knavery soon stalked about. In spite of clergy and churches men talked of dreadful omens, blazing stars or comets that had shot into the skies and were to be heard at night rushing with mighty noise across the heavens. Astrologers gained in credit, as well as in purse, and many people clutched their amulets or other tokens of protection as zealously as they made wide circuits about pox-marked doors or held tobacco or herbs to their noses when pestilence-wagons rolled through the streets. Handbills stuck on houses or scattered broadcast advertised "Sovereign cordials against the corruption of the air," "Anti-pestilential pills," "Incomparable drink against the plague, never known before," or gave a name and address, following it with "An eminent High Dutch physician,

newly come from Amsterdam, where he resided during the last pestilence, and cured thousands that actually had the plague upon them," or "An Italian gentlewoman, just arrived from Naples, has a choice secret to prevent infection, wherewith she did marvelous cures in Italy." So the poor people were hoodwinked and robbed and played upon, while government and reputable doctors preached in vain.

In Pump Lane it was much the same as elsewhere, though there was more time given for protection. Shops were shut, a few careworn physicians came and went, and people muffled and hooded themselves against infection, bought their food timorously, kept indoors from the night damp, and went about smelling and staring and shrinking whenever they heard a sudden sound or met a frightened face.

Oliver Pipe said to Grote one afternoon in the smithy, "You seem less afraid of this pestilence than most. Have you ever known it before?"

"Yes," answered Grote. "I was in Milan once when it was there. I rode through the city, and found it the Devil's own home."

"In Milan? I've heard tell how dreadful it was there."

Grote's eyes fastened on the old man's. "In a field outside the city I fell in with a company of men and women. They were all drinking, and singing, and dancing like mad folk. I had to use my pistols to get away from them. Then I met a girl, who begged

me to kill her, or take her away on my horse. I took her up—but that night she tried to stab me for my money. I can see her face as I caught her at it."

"Thank the good Saints this isn't Italy!" exclaimed Pipe, fervently. "You must have seen considerable in your journeys."

Grote was silent.

"Such things are enough to make any man fearful," continued Pipe.

"Why, no," said Grote. "Contemptuous more than fearful."

There were no smiles in Cheapside, even when the sun shone, and no loud voices except when some poor soul, unbalanced by fear or calamity, ran howling objurgations through the streets. The red cross marked more doors, women went farther from their homes to buy provisions from country folk who stayed on the outskirts of the city, and who, selling their fresh produce as quickly as they could, hastily retreated before possible infection. The continual toll of bells lent warning voices to the day and night, watchmen were set by the authorities to see that none of the sick left their houses, and men and women shunned the company of their kind so far as that was possible. They knew of few antidotes or protections for the most part, but many were careful to carry rue or wormwood in their hands and to put myrrh in their mouths when they went out-of-doors. The slightest illness was cause for apprehension, so often it led

to the sweating and sores that betokened the pestilence. Gloom enwrapped all parts of London, forming a cloud that hung heavier in the air than any winter fog.

Under the cloud some few kept their courage. In spite of Grote's saying that previous experience with the plague made him contemptuous of it Oliver Pipe considered that it was not contempt, but strength of spirit, that kept his assistant so calm, and the example greatly heartened the old smith. Others felt the same influence. One day Tom Jellett came into the smithy and found Grote hammering a horse-shoe. "They tell me you've lived in Italy," said Tom, "and know the pox. What can we men do?"

"Keep up folks' courage," answered Grote shortly, laying down his hammer and looking at the big man.

The prize-fighter frowned at the floor. "A little girl who lived near to me died yesterday. Small Walt Butcher is down. I've fought a score o' fights, but they were out in the open. This thing creeps up behind your back."

"The people in Italy ran away from it," said Grote.

Jellett turned on him, his blue eyes angry. "I've never run from anything," said he, "nor yet been called a coward."

Grote's face was calm, and the other man's anger vanished as quickly as it had come. He seemed held by that quiet scrutiny of the smith, and stared for

a full minute. "Tell me what to do," he begged at last.

The little half-amused curl of Grote's lips, often remarked by Oliver Pipe, was his immediate answer. The smith, apparently lost in thought, let his eyes roam to the partly-opened door. "The ancients had a saying I sometimes think of," he said, presently. "'Physician, cure thyself,' is what it comes to. I am no wiser than the rest of you."

Jellett scratched his head. "I be no scholar," he observed, "only a lad who can fight with his fists. You know more than that, and you can think out what a man might do."

Grote's gaze fell on him again, but the smith had no answer to make him. Baffled, and somewhat under the spell of the man's strange, silent manner, Jellett left the smithy shortly afterwards.

That night Oliver Pipe encountered a new phase in his assistant; the latter was talkative. In his chair, his black eyes fixed on the fire, rambling thoughts shaped themselves into words while Pipe listened in admiration. His apprentice appeared a man of experience, and one who was pondering deeply the things that he had seen. Most of his talk had to do with Italy, and some of it sent a chill to the old man's blood. He had been in other cities than Milan when they were sacked by the plague; he had found nunneries turned into shameless shambles, he had seen Princes of the Church fly from the beseeching

faces of their terror-stricken people, he had heard noblemen give the order to kill any who came to their gates for aid. "Such a high value they set on their lives," said he; "and their lives meant their lusts!"

Pipe stared. "Even the holy men?" he exclaimed.

Grote's lips smiled. "Even the holy men." He brooded over the thought. "They had the message in their Bible, 'He who saves his life shall lose it,' and they shut themselves up where nothing ill could find them—save their own terrors," he added.

Pipe nodded. "But ill thoughts are better company than the plague," he suggested.

"You think so?" said Grote. "Then you haven't tried both."

The next day Oliver Pipe's assistant went forth early. He sought out a physician in the better part of London, and learned from him what he could concerning the treatment of the plague. Then he ventured into the homes of illness, the poor hovels where love tended at bedsides, though there was neither knowledge nor resources to come to its aid. What the great King of France had not known in his palace, what Cardinals of the Roman Church had been denied, he found in the mean streets; devotion that took no thought of its own welfare, sacrifice that had forgotten itself, love that never faltered—these were in the places where poor men and women battled with disease. And he found more than this, he found doctors who had not deserted the sick, but served

them with every resource of their knowledge, and nurses who went in at the forbidding doorways and cheered and eased the households and interpreted the physicians' orders to the ignorant minds inside. In the home of Walt Butcher he met Sally Temple, a quiet, low-voiced woman, to whom Walt's father and mother now instinctively turned for help.

Sally, like Grote and Jellett, had watched and waited until she could do so no longer. Then she took it upon herself to help, where help was so much needed. She too had learned from physicians what she could do to safeguard herself, and carrying out their instructions, went about among the sick in Cheapside. Such work quickly begets at least a certain skill to perform it, and she grew capable and wise and patient. Women left their sufferers to her care while they snatched a little rest, and her smile lightened many a sick-room. When Grote found her beside little Walt's bed he showed no surprise, and though from that day on they often met, neither talked to the other except of their work. That kept them busy enough in all conscience, and left little room for any other thoughts. Between them they brought Walt Butcher back to safety, for nursing, abetted by such skill in physic as was to be had, managed to avert some of the ravages even of the plague.

Jellett begged Grote for a little of his knowledge, and with this the prize-fighter also battled with the

common foe. He, too, often met Sally, and his love leaped higher than ever as he saw the devotion and courage that seemed to grow in her. She was vastly more now than the spirited, beautiful girl he had found by the Surrey roadside; she was showing a strength hardly to be expected, although to Jellett mysterious womankind had always owned a subtle power of soul that men knew nothing of.

And indeed Sally was growing, as were many more in distressed London. The woman was supplanting the girl in her, although the girl would never altogether vanish from her eyes.

Grote became a great figure among the frightened people. He picked up knowledge until the physicians knew little more than he, and his help was begged by the needy in Cheapside. Men spoke of him with quick-growing respect, and obeyed his commands implicitly, putting reliance in him as in no one else they knew. Sometimes Sally watched him with thoughtful eyes, and as she did so she echoed the common opinion. He had a strength she did not understand, but one that she found could be utterly dominating. A word from him, and she did his bidding. Only afterwards did she wonder at him.

For three long months the plague-cloud hung in the air, and boats stopped plying on the river, and shops were shut, and tongues whispered of only one topic. The toll of the scourge was heavy throughout London, but heaviest in those quarters where the

poor lived cramped together. Sally and Grote and Jellett were only a few of many scores of fighters, for where need comes there also comes help, and champions will be found even in the tangled forests of ignorance. Sally grew white and her eyes were always strained and tired, but she knew that others needed her strength more than she needed it herself, and gave it to them without hesitation.

"It's wonderful what some people can do," Oliver Pipe said to Grote at one of those rare times when they supped together. "There's Sally Temple; I've always known she was a lass o' spirit, but from what folks say she has brain and courage, too. She puts her hand to a matter and she does it, so they tell me —like as if her hands were made for such work. Who'd have thought it of pretty, willful Sally?"

Grote made no reply, except to nod his head a little.

"She always could twist men about her fingers," continued the old smith reflectively, "and now she's showing that her finger be worth being twisted round. She's no flutterby. Take my word, Conrad, she's a woman as makes up for many a fickle wench."

"Whatever you have heard tell about her," said Grote, "I can tell you ten times more and better things," and he got up from the table and put on his hat and went out to a house in the Court that bore the red cross.

In spite of all the precautions that care dictated

Gilbert Stanes fell sick early in June. He complained of a fever, and stayed in bed, and as the course of the plague ran quick, Sally and Kate knew by nightfall that he had taken it. Then began the same scenes in their little dwelling that had already been enacted in so many other homes. A physician brought them physic, and left them to pit their nursing against the attack of their unseen enemy

Both women were tireless nurses. They divided the twenty-four hours into watches, and day and night either his mother or his aunt was at Gilbert's bedside. His small room, at the rear of the house, was lighted by a single window, and the greater part of the daytime a curtain hung over it, to shield the sick man's eyes. In that dim light, Kate, trained by hard years of toil to few words and little show of feeling, sat by her son's bed, anticipating his wants as best she could, and watching him with eyes filled with prayers. When she left, Sally took her place, moving on tiptoe about the darkened room, or crouching in the chair. Her cheeks were colorless, her eyes were heavy-ringed, and only her loose-bound hair still kept its beauty. She gave no time nor thought to herself those days, for every consideration was for her dear nephew.

Below-stairs Tom Jellett took up his post. When he first heard that Gilbert was ill, he went at once to Sally, and begged that he might be allowed to share in the nursing.

"Kate and I can tend him, Tom," she said. "There's little work another can do."

"But I love him too, Sally," Jellett protested, "and though I be heavy-handed I can serve him somehow. Let me get the food, and fetch the water. You two'll be so busy, someone must provide."

She looked at his earnest face, that had often seemed so ingenuous to her as he had listened to Gilbert's reading or his scholar's words. "You're very kind, Tom," she said, gently, "but there are others who need you more. Kate and I can manage."

His face made her feel almost ashamed of her words, his blue eyes were as hurt as those of a child unjustly scolded. "But it's Gilly who's sick, Sally," he protested again. "Let me tend to the house below-stairs."

So it came about that Tom Jellett took his station there, and saw to it that the two women had no care beyond that of the sick man.

What little physic, and knowledge gained in other cases, could do, was done, but for the most part it was a case of watch and pray. Nursing was of use, but there were times when Gilbert seemed beyond the reach of even such devoted tenders, and Kate and Sally, knowing too well the story of the plague in other homes, felt themselves impotent to help. They dared not look at each other for the fear in their faces, and the knowledge that they could give so little aid.

When the illness was near its height Conrad Grote came to the house. Sally was downstairs, making a cup of tea to carry to her sister. Tom Jellett had gone on an errand, and Kate was with her son.

"I know about Gilbert," said Grote, abruptly walking into the room. "You must let me help you. We've seen enough of this together for you to know that the strength of two is better than one."

She remembered the many times when they had stood together lately, and how he had seemed of untold value to the sick. She looked up at him, and saw the strength in his drawn and haggard face. "Gilly does need you," she said. "He's very sick. Kate is with him now." Then, as he turned and went up the stairs, she stared at the teapot in her hand, wondering for the thousandth time what manner of man this smith with the eyes of a Crusader really was.

Grote went upstairs to Gilbert's bedroom, where Kate sat watching by her son. He saw the forlorn woman, hands knotted in her lap, brooding in dumb despair. He had seen the same figure for days in other houses, the pitiful bent toiler, father or mother, too worn to hold any hope of happiness for themselves, watching the hope they had passed on to their child flicker and fail.

Kate glanced about at the sound of the man's step. She seemed too apathetic to care who might enter. She looked again at her son, and Grote stole in and

stood beside her, watching Gilbert. Presently he poured some drops into a glass from a phial that stood on a small table, and gestured to her to lift Gilbert's head and give him the draught. She did so. A little later he repeated the act; and afterwards changed Gilbert's position in bed. When Sally came to relieve her sister Grote stayed, and from time to time ministered to the sick youth.

The weary hours dragged on, but now insensibly both women felt a glimmering hope in the presence of the stranger. He had control of the sick room. He knew what should be done; but more than that he held up their courage with his own. Kate looked at him more often, and something she saw in his deep, considerate eyes each time cheered her. She felt that he was more than a physician; but she did not try to understand his power.

Through one long night Sally and Grote stayed in Gilbert's room together. Occasionally they whispered, but for the most of the time they were silent. The candle showed Sally the man's intent figure, sitting like a soldier on guard, his face absorbed and alert. She watched him covertly, shading her eyes with her hand, but she did not once catch him watching her.

That long night's vigil brought the man and woman close together. When the dawn came, and Sally left the room, Grote went with her. In the little hall she stopped a minute, leaning against the

wall. "You've been such a help," she said, "such a help! I can never thank you enough for it." "There's no need of words," he answered. "I sometimes think we understand better without them."

When the crisis came the next day it seemed to Sally and Kate that it was Conrad Grote who saved Gilbert for them. He stood above the bed and fought the plague. Not for an instant of the long, racking hours did he relinquish his battle. His will rose supreme, and the sick man appeared only an instrument on which he played. The women watched his face, set in every line, his eyes absorbed with Gilbert. The day passed, but he never relaxed his vigilance; the afternoon waned, and at last his tense lips parted, and he nodded his head. They looked at Gilbert. Some spirit told them that he had turned the corner, and was coming back. Kate fell on her knees, and Sally turned tear-filled eyes of gratitude to Grote.

The following day they knew that Gilbert was mending. In the evening Sally went downstairs to the room in which Grote and Jellett were sitting. She was white, but her eyes were very happy. Her lips trembled a little as she looked at the weary face of Grote. "It was you that saved him," she said. "You and you only." Her voice shook. "Thank God you came to the Lane."

Jellett nodded at Sally. "Aye, you're right," he said. "He be every inch a man. I knew it when

first I clapped my eyes on him at the smithy, and what he's done hereabouts have proved it."

"Gilly's much better now," Sally continued. "Oh, but you must be worn out with all this. Go home and rest. We can watch him now."

Grote smiled. "I'm ready to take your orders," he said, quietly. "I think I could sleep till Doomsday."

When the smith had gone, Jellett looked at Sally. "He be a strange man," he said, musingly. "Sometimes I think he don't belong with us."

"And where does he belong, then, Tom?" she asked.

He gestured his ignorance. "He might be a general in the King's army, perhaps."

For the first time in days Sally laughed. "Oh, Tom, your wits are surely a-wool-gathering! A blacksmith be a general in the army!"

"But he be no common blacksmith." Jellett rubbed his head, perplexedly. "Come to think of it, Sally, I think he be a most uncommon sort of man."

Sally was happy enough to agree with any statement. "Well, Tom, I don't know but what you're right," she said. "But whether he might be a general or a smith doesn't matter; he's saved Gilly, and that's enough for now."

Before many more days the plague was loosing its evil hold on London, which lay scarred like a fire-swept forest.

XV

SALLY'S PROBLEM

AS the long, hard, plague-burdened winter and spring gave way reluctantly to the sun of summer the Pump Lane people came slowly back to some relish for life. The sickness had run its course, and though its toll had been tremendously heavy, and strength and savings had been sapped to the breaking-point, the horizon looked a little clearer, and there were a few blue patches in the sky. So men and women and children trod the ill-paved Lane and the worse-paved Court a little more cheerfully, fathers and husbands and sons began to resume their sessions in the tap-room of the Bear and Staff, mothers and wives and daughters to throw open their front windows, and leaning on their sills, to gossip with their neighbors across the way, or critically regard those who passed in the street. Like flowers that will spring up afresh every Maytime, the old familiar tricks of character revived, the dormant Pharisee shrugged his cold shoulders, the shrew's tongue clacked, and Mistress Kilgore renewed her speculations on Sally Temple's future. But some at least had changed and grown and ripened.

A new character now stood forth boldly in that little quarter of the town, and one that furnished food for much speculation. His nearest associate, old Oliver Pipe, was known to regard the man with almost superstitious awe. He had confided to cronies that Conrad Grote had lived in Italy, and had seen things that would stand one's hair on end. He was scholar as well as blacksmith, he had strange notions, he might have met with Satan at some time, and battled with him in the desert. These thoughts spread abroad, and were twisted and exaggerated, until the smithy became a Mecca for the curious.

All the Lane knew that Grote had helped half-a-hundred households during the plague; but he seemed to disdain all thanks for what he had done. Gratitude drove him instantly into his shell, and he could not manage to come out from it to meet other people's humors. Therefore the neighbors still had to view him from a distance, the older men and women with sober eyes, the young men and girls with frankly romantic curiosity. Now and then maidens shyly hinted to their lovers that they had dreamed of the tall, black-eyed smith, thinking thereby to rouse sparks of jealousy.

Two men came frequently to the shop to see him—Gilbert Stanes, as his strength returned, and Tom Jellett. With the young clerk Grote had the bond of a scholar's knowledge, but with the prize-fighter there was no such easily-understood common interest.

Yet Jellett dropped in very often, and sat on a bench and watched the other man work. Sometimes he would ask questions, but frequently he would keep silent, seeming entirely satisfied to gaze at Grote. Gilbert, on the other hand, usually talked; and when the invalid was well again it was not unusual for Mr. Pipe of an evening to find his shop the scene of a lengthy argument between the smith and the clerk, while the Byberry Boy, with fascinated eyes, if somewhat puzzled brow, turned his head from one speaker to the other.

On a warm Sunday, when Gilbert could be out-doors, Jellett procured a cart and horse, and drove Kate and Sally and their convalescent over London Bridge into Surrey. The trees were in full leaf, the hedges a shimmer of deep green, and the sky that indescribably sweet blue that tempts the lark to sing his very best. The open world was a caress to Gilbert. He sat silent as they jogged into it, his eyes dreaming over the stretching downs, his white face perfectly content with the soft haze that the sun called from gorse and heather. Even Kate felt the beauty of the day, although it was Gilbert's face, and not the sky's, that brought a softness to her eyes. She had her arm behind him to shield him from the jolts, and her hand held his. In front sat Sally, beside Jellett, her hat in her lap, her face and eyes beginning again to look as fresh and smiling as anything Surrey could show.

They came to an open meadow beside a brook, with a lane running down one side of it. Sally chose the place for their camp, and Jellett drove to some willows near the bank. They climbed out of the cart, and with the water at their feet, and the trunk of a tree for Gilbert's back, they ate the luncheon Kate and Sally had prepared. Afterwards Gilbert and his mother sat there, while Sally and Jellett started to follow the course of the stream.

An old stone bridge checked their progress after a time, and Sally, throwing her cloak on the grass, sat down. Jellett stretched himself beside her. "Oh," said he, "that turf's rarely comfortable! I wasn't made for London's stones."

Sally regarded him complacently. "No, Tom, it's the open road you should have, the free road where we first met. Do you mind the day when you came singing down the highroad, bread and cheese in the bundle on your stick, and found me sitting there alone?"

"Do I?" said he, sitting up eagerly. "You, with your feet so tired, running away from that Marquis!"

"You were very kind to me, Tom—I had a wild man to deal with."

"You be right there, Sally. He was a wild man; wild to fight me with fists when he knew naught about it."

The girl nodded lightly to the brook; but when she

looked at Jellett her face was thoughtful. "He was a man bent on having his way, no matter what stood between."

"Women should mate with their likes, and men too," said Jellett, his eyes on the water.

Now Sally, who had had to be serious so long, could no more resist the lure of mischief than a cat can resist cream. She pouted, and her eyelashes flickered dangerously. "I heard tell of a lady, a Countess of Kew, who ran away with a simple fighting man; and they were happy."

"Did you so? Well, mayhap a fighting man be different. Oh, Sally, dear, come down the road with me! I can win a living, will buy you gowns, and never a word on my tongue but love for you. How I would fight, my dear! I could knock out a dozen like old Bombardier. I be a very strong man, Sally; fit to take care of you."

She looked at his powerful chest and shoulders, his frank face, and clear blue eyes. She compared him to the gentlemen she met about the theatre, and he had the advantage over all of them. She thought of Elihu Knott and the other youths of the Lane, sallow-faced already, who had once sought her. He was a better mate for her than any of them, and she imagined that she understood how it was that the great lady had given herself to the prize-fighter for joy in his simple strength.

"Oh, Sally, come with me!" he begged.

She clasped her hands in her lap, and looked down. "Oh, Tom—" she said; and stopped.

"What's the matter?"

"I don't know," sighed Sally. "Something tells me not to."

"What?" he demanded, huskily.

She shook her head. "I don't love you enough—it must be that. And yet I'm ever so fond of you."

The big fellow gazed at her adoringly, while Sally trembled, wondering if he would seize her in his arms. If he should she did not know what she would do, it might take so little to decide her. He sat still, however, having no notion of how the scales were trembling, and his silence gave her a respite. "Tom, dear, you're a very fine man, and a lovable one too," she said, ultimately. "The trouble's all with me. I'm like a candle-light, blowing a different way in every breeze. And some day, I daresay, I'll be sorry for it."

"You're so lovely, Sally, a man don't care what you do."

She smiled—when could Sally Temple ever fail to smile at such a speech?—but she clasped her hands tighter, and shook her head. "Yes, it does matter. Some day I might be sorry; and if I give my heart to the wrong man, where will I be then?"

Jellett stared at the back of his hand, that was pressed against his thigh. "If you'd make a try at it with me, Sally?" he said.

"And break your heart when it failed? Perhaps some day another lad would come down the road, singing a new tune, and foolish me would listen—just like the woman who left her lord for the fighter. It's only someone who takes every bit of my heart can hold me, Tom. I know how it would be, giving pieces."

She ventured to look at him. "A lad who travels like you must see a hundred pretty girls in a twelvemonth. Almost any of them is better than I. I'm so strange—even to myself."

His steady eyes turned to hers. "You be you," he stated, "and if I married a dozen others the face of you would come between my wife and me. That's the fact, Sally. I'd be forever remembering your eyes."

"I'm sorry, Tom," she said, truthfully, for never had she met with greater sincerity. "If I were only different it might be—but I'm such a wayward woman. You'll find someone much better."

She felt unkind and hard, he was so gentle and considerate with her. A silence fell between them, broken only by the rippling brook. At last Jellett picked up a stone, and threw it into the water. "I'm such a fool!" he cried, passionately.

"And I too," echoed Sally.

"I'm not blaming you," he said. "I'm blaming my own wits."

"Perhaps if you knew what I think of Sally

Temple sometimes," said she, "you'd be ashamed to keep her company." She laughed constrainedly. "Let's go back to Kate and Gilly; we both think well of them, at any rate."

It was a day out of fairyland to Gilbert and his mother, and their calm, rested faces spoke reassuringly to Sally. Gilbert, bundled up, his eyes on the trees that lined the meadow across the brook, was talking, while Kate appeared to listen. As usual, it was a monologue; but neither the speaker nor the listener seemed the less pleased for that.

Jellett drove them home before sunset, and left the three at their door. As he handed Sally down from her seat, she felt his strong arm tremble, and dared not look in his face. But his voice spoke reassuringly in her ear. "You be a good lass, Sally. Don't you mind for me," he whispered.

"Thank you, Tom," she answered, with a squeeze of the hand; and turned to the front door.

Soon after their early supper Gilbert went upstairs to bed. When she had helped Kate with the evening chores, Sally stood in the open doorway, looking into the street. Already the twilight was fading. There were people moving about, and sounds, but she saw and heard them indistinctly. The old unnamable longing of summer was in her blood, the craving for life that is as much pain as pleasure. A year ago her thoughts would have turned to Vauxhall Gardens, to her comrades of the

theatre, or her admirers of the other end of town; those who would gladly entertain her for the pleasure her company gave them. But a change had come over her, and she could not understand the new flow of her thoughts.

Presently she climbed the stairs, and knocked at Gilbert's door. He called to her to come in. His room was dark, but the little window at the rear framed a patch of star-embroidered sky.

"You're not sleepy, Gilly?" she asked; and when he assured her that he was not, she sat down at the window. "I'm restless," she said, "and want to talk my thoughts out." There was a silence; and then, somewhat hurriedly, she began. "Gilly, do you remember the night before I went to Cumnor Castle? How we talked by the window? How I told you I could outface the Marquis or any man alive? It seems years ago. Well, Gilly, it was true enough then, I was free and brave and self-reliant as could be. I was so sure of myself. But I'm not so sure of myself now. I'm growing afraid, afraid of so many different things."

"Everyone talks of how brave and fine you've been, dear," said her nephew.

She went on, unheeding. "Tom asked me to marry him to-day—oh, he's done it before—there's no secret what he's staying here for. I don't care for him enough; and yet, Gilly, he seems a rock of refuge. It's just as you said about Rob Sloane and

Stephen Tamworth, honest, poor men who work, only Tom is truer and stronger than they. I'd never be jealous of Tom, he'd be my own man always, and only mine. But I couldn't say yes to Tom."

Gilbert drew himself up in bed, and peered at the figure by the window. "Is there some other man, Sally?" he asked in his quiet voice.

Sally's face was turned away from him, but he could see that she shook her head. "No, no. But I can feel there might be a different man, and he might make me most unhappy, Gilly; and—I couldn't protect myself from him."

She did not care whether Gilbert spoke or not; and, though he cast about for advice, he could find none to fit the occasion. She rested her elbow on the sill, and watched the stars. For some reason her thoughts went back to a night when she had watched them from the hall at Cumnor. She could remember how she had trembled when the Marquis stood beside her. "Perhaps it's like a battle, after all —perhaps that's what love between man and woman is," she said, "and it's man who wins in the end." She caught her hands together. "Or is it woman who wins—and doesn't know it?"

Gilbert smiled. "You will never deceive yourself, dear," he said. "You are too true for that."

Sally's eyes looked defiantly at the stars as her thoughts wrestled with her problems.

Presently she rose, and kissed Gilbert good-night.

She went to her own room, and to bed, preoccupied and serious. The moon peeped into her chamber, and, as if to reassure her, sent a silver beam across her coverlet.

XVI

A LANDLORD VISITS HIS TENANTS

TWO men ventured into Pump Lane a few days later, and walked its length with keenly scrutinizing eyes. The one was short, slight, and dark, with an inquisitive cast of countenance; the other reddish of face, and plethoric of habit. "It's been a bad winter, what with the cold and the plague," said the first, "and the rents are very difficult collecting." "What a vile sty it is!" answered the other. "It might almost be better to burn the place down, and build afresh. You say the pox was bad here? What a pity it didn't clean out the kennels for me!"

"Aye, the plague was bad, and the cold was bad, and food was high as St. Paul's Cathedral. So the rascals say when my men go for the rents."

"Damme, Talbot, screw it out of them! I'll not have a man Jack living on my land a day without pay for it! Do you hear me?"

The short man could not help but hear, as the other shouted all his words. "As you say, your Grace, as you say," he replied, nodding his head, and throwing out his hands.

The two men appraised the houses as they went along, the reddish one listening to the other's statements of facts and figures. At last they came to the open door of Pipe's smithy, and the ring of hammer on anvil met their ears. "Does the smith yield me a profit?" asked the burly man. "A scant one," answered Talbot. "He's an old man, and I've been thinking that perhaps we'd best turn him out."

The questioner walked in at the door, and found a young man standing over the anvil. "Not so very old, Talbot," said he, pointing at the workman.

Talbot looked puzzled. "Who are you?" he demanded of the smith.

The latter stopped his hammering. "My name is Grote," he answered.

Talbot wrinkled his brow, as if trying to place the man. "Oh, aye, I remember now. Grote—aye, they told me about you. You nursed some of the plague-ridden."

"You've plenty of work, fellow?" inquired the reddish man abruptly.

Grote shrugged his shoulders. He did not appear to care for this questioning.

"How much do you earn in a week?" asked the same man.

"That's Oliver Pipe's affair," said Grote.

The inquisitor shot him an angry glance, as if on his part he did not relish the workman's independent attitude. He tapped his stick impatiently against

the smithy floor. "If my opinion was asked, Talbot," said he, "I should say this fellow had a churlish tongue."

The smith dropped his hammer on the anvil, and his fingers took a grip at the edges of his leather apron. "But your opinion's neither asked nor wanted," said he, his brows beetling. "If you've work to be done, name it; if not, yon's the door."

The small man gasped; the other grew purplish, and made a curious sucking sound in his throat. His stick stopped tapping; he raised it, and leveling it at the smith, cried, "You crop-eared rascal, you!"

"One moment," interposed Talbot, stepping forward. "He doesn't know who you are. Smith, you are speaking to his Grace the Duke of Chatto. His Grace owns all this part of town." He grinned maliciously, looking as if he expected Grote to fall on his knees and grovel.

Grote, however, did nothing of the sort, but continued to stare at the reddish man with level eyes.

"Have you found your manners, man?" thundered the Duke; and as Grote remained silent, "Have you lost your tongue, too?" he demanded.

The smith smiled at him, although not amiably. "I've been a long time in Italy," he said, "and so am unfamiliar with the look of your English nobles. But I think I shall remember his Grace the Duke of Chatto."

"What do you mean, fellow?" exploded the Duke.

"What I say; no more nor less."

His Grace stared, and Talbot, his agent, stared. Then the Duke, who had a certain store of wisdom, swung about on his heel. "It's idle talking to fools," he said; and marched out of the smithy.

It was an exceedingly unpleasant predicament for Talbot, who had already found the Duke in no very amiable humor that morning, and who now saw him flouted by a common blacksmith. "Old Pipe shall pay well for this, your Grace," said he, apologetically. "I'll add a shilling a week to his rent. Such a surly rascal as that Grote I've never clapped eyes on before!"

The Duke had stopped in the Court, and was taking snuff, which operation made him appear even less attractive than usual. "Damme, Talbot, it's fortunate the people aren't all like him," he said sourly; "he stood up to me like a piece of cannon."

"It was monstrous, your Grace, monstrous!" said the agent, spreading out his hands.

The Duke dropped his snuff-box into the pocket of his coat, and bored his walking-stick into the muddy street. "In the old days I might have had him whipped out of town at the tail of a cart," he observed; "but the good old days are gone. The people have too many liberties, Talbot; devilish more liberty than's good for 'em!"

"They have, your Grace; it's what I always say," agreed the small man, who, as he took his short,

mincing steps beside the Duke, resembled a staidly-hopping blackbird.

They were retracing their passage through the Lane, when, half-way down, his Grace of Chatto stopped somewhat abruptly. "Who's the girl?" said he, digging the point of his left elbow into his agent's arm.

The agent saw two women standing in front of Mistress Kilgore's door; but he had no difficulty in making out which one it was that his noble patron meant. "That," said he, in his most pleasant, purring tones, "is Sally Temple. Your Grace may have heard of her?"

"No. Why should I?"

"She plays in the theatre at Drury Lane."

"Ah?" said the Duke; and examined the girl more closely. "Now, she is a pretty creature, Talbot," he continued. "None of your coarse London type, but with a deuced trim figure. Yet she won't snap in two like some ladies I know. Diana—what a Diana she'd make for a painter, eh, Talbot? Running through the wood, a stag beside her, hair blown about—I've some of 'em at Chatto House. She's a devilish pretty creature, Talbot."

No wonder the agent looked pleased at the first enthusiasm his noble patron had shown that day. "She's a credit indeed to Pump Lane, your Grace," said he, eagerly.

"I'll walk by, and look at her more closely," said

the suspicious nobleman; and proceeded down the middle of the way.

The two women stopped talking, and glanced at the men. Both Sally and Mistress Kilgore knew Nicholas Talbot by sight, and it was very evident to them that his companion was a gentleman. Therefore they curtsied, and drew a little to one side. Sally, however, found herself so frankly stared at by the reddish gentleman that she blushed, and then bit her lip for having done so.

When the two men had come to the end of the Lane the Duke stopped again, and nudged his agent. The latter was struck with the peculiar vividness of his Grace's yellow-green eyes. "She's better near than far, Talbot," said the Duke, rapping his walking-stick against the other's leg. "Egad, eyes, hair, and color superfine! Did you note her color when I ogled her?"

"A beautiful creature, my lord," agreed the time-serving Talbot.

"And how came such beauty into Pump Lane?" quoth the Duke. "And why should it stay here? On my word, Talbot, I've not seen such eyes since I was at Versailles five years ago; no, nor then, come to think of it, for when an English girl is pretty she outshines any of those French wenches. Damme, she does, I tell you, Talbot!"

"Your Grace is always patriotic," declared the agent, humbly.

"It's a fact, Talbot, a fact," snapped the Duke. "What's her name again?" He rapped the little man on the shin.

"Sally Temple, your Grace."

"And she plays at the theatre sometimes, eh? I shall have my man keep an eye on the playbills. She's spoilt in Pump Lane, Talbot. Egad, what eyes! Silks for pretty Sally, and a little nest not so far from Chatto House."

Then an unpleasant thought occurred to him. "Has she any lovers?"

"I'm not kept informed, your Grace; but if she has—" The agent's manner only too clearly indicated that the Duke had nothing to fear from any possible rivals.

"Keep an eye on her for me," commanded the Duke; and turned into the high street. Talbot accompanied him to his waiting coach, and helped him in. The little man watched the coach drive off, and stood, chuckling to himself. By accident he had found something that might help him to keep his patron's favor in spite of the poor rents.

If the noble Duke had planted one sort of seed in his agent's mind that day, he had sowed quite another in the mind of the blacksmith. Gilbert learned this when he claimed his favorite seat in the smithy that night, and talked with his friend. The clerk's main object had by now come to be the drawing out of Grote, for when he succeeded in that he was certain

to hear a stream of curious facts, strange opinions, and most unusual conclusions, that were more stirring to him than any book.

This night, however, the smith spoke without urging. "I had an honor paid me this noon," said he. "The Duke of Chatto came into the smithy. Have you ever seen him?"

Gilbert shook his head.

"How shall I draw him for you?" went on Grote, his eyes ruminating. "Not so fat as a hog, yet piglike; not so sleek as tallow, yet very smooth. Small-eyed, loose-lipped, a rake, a usurer, and a bully, if ever I've seen one."

Gilbert looked about nervously. "Not too loud, Conrad," said he. "His Grace owns all this place."

"There's none to hear," Grote reassured him, with a smile. "Even old Oliver's away."

"And what did he want?" asked Gilbert.

"I think he was making sure that his good agent was taxing the people enough."

"He's screwed the last farthing out of us already."

"Aye, that his Grace's bread may be sweet and fine; that he may wear his satins, and tempt his palate, and deck out his women. I know the working of it; oh, I've seen his Grace before, the Duke of This, and the Count of That, and the Prince of T'other. A noble crew, our masters, Gilbert; be thankful your farthings help to feed them!"

"He's made you too bitter, Conrad. It isn't wise to think of the difference between us."

Grote stroked his chin with his hand in his old habit. "What do you think of our nobles yourself?" he asked.

Gilbert leaned forward in his chair. "I've no love for them," he said, his voice lowered. "They take whatever they want, and give nothing in return. They're not even good fighting men any longer. Selfish, cunning, cruel they are, Conrad. I'll tell you something. It's Sally's story; but I can trust you with it. She went, to help some gentlefolk, to the house of one of these nobles, the Marquis of Romsey."

"Yes," said Grote, shielding his eyes with his hand.

"This Marquis was a tyrant, mean, and cold, and bitter. She's told me all about him. He thought she was his ward, and wanted to marry her; he would have driven her into doing it; and once she was his he would have left her alone to eat out her heart in chagrin. With such a master, what chance would Sally have had? She'd have been only a pretty flower in his garden; nothing more. Thank God she got away!"

Grote shifted in his seat, but kept his face hidden.

"For that Marquis was a beast," continued Gilbert. "He was used to taking whatever he wanted, whether it was a girl or a poor man's farm. He must have whatever he fancied; and so it is with

all of the nobles, they're just beasts of prey, Conrad."

"And if this Marquis had married her, you think it would have made small difference to him?"

"There was no love between them. How could there be, between Sally and such a creature?"

"How could there be?" echoed Grote. "Honesty on the one side, and deviltry on the other; the strains will not mix." He rose, and paced between the door and his bench. "Yes, Sally was fortunate to escape that man," said he. "It would have been an ill fate for such a woman as she."

"You think well of her, don't you, Conrad?" Gilbert queried eagerly.

The smith's face was away from Gilbert, but the latter could not doubt the sincerity of his words. "I think her as fine a woman as God ever made," said he, "as fine as she is beautiful."

The clerk's face brightened. He sat back and clasped his hands behind his head. "So now you have my feeling on our masters," said he. "My Marquis of Romsey to your Duke of Chatto—both the same breed."

"The same breed," agreed Grote. Then, to Gilbert's great surprise, Grote turned suddenly, and stared at him with searching eyes. "Can any good come out of such a crew?" he demanded. "Can black ever turn white—or even gray?"

"Not the black Marquis of Romsey, at least,"

answered Gilbert, with a half-laugh. "'There's no good in him,' said Sally; and she's not over-hard in judging men."

Grote drew away, and stood with folded arms and head a trifle bent. "It's said the leopard cannot change his spots," said he, "so why the man change the lusts that were born in him? Yet the hottest-blooded man I ever knew in Italy became a hermit in the desert."

"You have strange moods," said Gilbert.

The smith looked up. "Black moods, wild moods! It's a bitter, savage fight! But I will beat them yet, I'll shake the poison out of them, I'll drive the herd of sickened swine into the sea! Mark my words, Gilbert, they shall do my bidding!"

Suddenly he was a priest exorcising devils, a chieftain routing traitors; such for the moment was the face and figure of Conrad Grote the smith. The clerk could not understand him; but was immensely shaken. He gazed spellbound, until the sudden passion dropped from the man's face, and Grote stood pale and tremulous before him.

Some of the wonder was still in Gilbert's mind when he went home, and found Sally yet astir. "What a strange man Conrad is!" said he. "If he weren't such a good man, I'd think he had some evil on his conscience."

Sally smiled. "How much you do like him, Gilly!"

"Why, so I do; though he puzzles me. Have you

ever felt the strangeness in him, like a wild animal kept in leash?"

"Yes," admitted Sally. She wrinkled her brows at some thought of her own, and then, suddenly turning, put her hands on her nephew's shoulders, and kissed him. "Don't have too much to do with wild animals, dear," she said; "they bring unhappiness;" and was gone before he could ask what she meant.

XVII

THE SUPPER AT RICHMOND

THE theatres of London opened their doors for the first time since the plague in the early summer, and near the end of June George Willis, of Drury Lane, brought Sally a commission to appear at that famous playhouse, and act a leading rôle in a new drama. The play-going public, more eager for pleasure than ever since its banishment, was heartily glad to see her again, and gentlemen eyed her through their quizzing-glasses, while ladies recalled all the spicy bits of gossip that had ever been whispered concerning the young woman. Like a star of a steady orbit that is certain to delight the eye, Sally swam into the town sky, and glowed and shone there. As a year before, so now her name was bruited about, and, as was the custom among her circle of acquaintances, she fell again into the way of being seen in Vauxhall Gardens on pleasant afternoons.

It was in that delightful enclosure that Sir John Gorham happened to encounter Charles Tree one day in July. "Well, well, Charlie," exclaimed the

baronet, giving the other a hearty grasp of the hand, "back from France at last? Egad, your honeymoon has run to a year of honey! And how is the Lady Pam?"

"Blooming," said Charles. "We stop with my aunt in Curzon Street."

"And she does not require you to hold her hand all day? Charles, should you be gadding about on pleasure without her? Do you mind it was only a year ago your coach broke down in the road, and we found you sitting under the laburnum?"

"Indeed I do," Charles replied.

Sir John grinned. "Dorset and Verney and I. The poor little Earl, he's just married Lady Araminta Gosling—his mother drove him to it while they were in Yorkshire—their estates touch. Verney's in Naples; and only I remain."

"And you found Mistress Temple for me here," continued Charles, "and she saved the day for Pam and me."

"So she did. Has the dragon ever relented to you?"

"Curious thing," pondered Charles. "Romsey disappeared a few months later. He left word he was going back to Italy, being tired of life at Cumnor."

"You should have seen how Sally baited him there! He didn't find life tiresome while she stayed. What doings there were at Cumnor! And what a battle he

put up with a fighting-man all on account of her!" Sir John's eyes gleamed at the recollection.

"How is the brave girl?" asked Charles.

Sir John shook his head, while he twirled his light malacca walking-stick. "I see very little of her. Some say she's prettier than ever. I caught a glimpse of her last week. But there's a story forward—" Sir John shook his head, regretfully.

"What story?"

"A great ship o' the line is chasing our little pinnace, a great ship that can bring many guns to bear."

"Who?"

"No other than his Grace of Chatto, the old Red Fox. And what can any girl do with him?"

"It's not fair sport," protested Charles.

"When did the Duke ever play fair?"

Charles Tree looked across at the Mall. "I declare I think I see Mistress Temple now," said he; and he pointed.

Sir John followed his finger. "And with Chatto, too! Good-by, Sally Temple. May the Saints defend you!"

The Duke of Chatto was evidently regarded as a privileged potentate, for none of the unattached men in the Gardens joined Sally and him, although the girl had never looked more lovely, nor carried herself with a more alluring grace.

"Mistress Temple," the Duke was saying to her,

"I shall make it my affair to see that your next rôle at Drury Lane is more worthy of your talents. You should hold the center of the stage all the time. They treat you very badly."

"If that's your opinion," she said, "I wish you were the manager."

Chatto's eyes were like a fox-terrier's as he watched her face. "From the hour I saw you first at the theatre," said he, "I've had no thought of any other woman."

"Oh, how can I believe that!"

"You must," said he, very positively; "and much more, too! Prove it by asking any gift of me."

She looked at him sidewise, and his reddish face grew still more sanguine. She was teasing him, and if there was one thing the Duke could not withstand, it was being teased by a pretty woman.

"Sally," he said, inflecting his voice to a cajoling murmur, "ask anything of me; I can't resist you."

There were a great many things she might have asked him for, such as the free rental of her sister's house in the Lane, or a cloak of ermine, or even a coach-and-four, with a stable to keep it in. This new admirer of hers was not only Duke of Chatto, and Marquis of Quorn, and Viscount of Foljambe, but so rich that he could have bought the bigger half of London for a country-seat. It was intoxicating just to think of such wealth as his.

"Ask anything I want?" said Sally, with her

lashes lowered. "Then, pray, who was the last woman you made that offer to?"

"On my word—" began his Grace.

"For sure you must have made that offer before to know how tempting it sounds. And what did she take? And where is the lady now? You see I would like to know what happens to them." She flashed a glance at his baffled face.

"You treat me unfairly," said he. "I place myself at your feet; and you make sport of me."

"That's the way of the world," said Sally. "And see, you refuse my very first request."

The Duke gnawed his under-lip; he was not making his customary progress. Yet when he considered the situation it looked simple enough; an unprotected quarry running before him, to be tired out and overtaken when he would.

But he had to do with a girl who was much wiser than he thought. Sally, so far in her experience, had kept her head where gentlemen were concerned, and the Duke of Chatto, though the noblest, was by no means the first of his breed she had met. She knew his strength and his weakness, she had measured him at an early meeting, and she had trust enough in herself to face him fairly.

It was well she had confidence, for his Grace was a persistent suitor. Whenever she left the Lane he was likely to appear; he grew to be a constant votary of the theatre; he filled Sally's dressing-room at

Drury Lane with the choicest blooms from his own gardens; he tried to keep himself continually before her. When the Duke came on the scene, all others deserted Sally; he was too great a man to have his wishes thwarted in any particular; and neither actor nor actress, lordling nor fop, cared to brave the anger of his eye. To tell the truth, most of the theatre and the world that mixed with it were immensely edified at the pursuit. Sally was lucky to have caught such a prize, they said; and they only hoped that she would bleed him to the Queen's taste. Gossip had it that his Grace's wife, who had left Chatto House three months after her marriage, and lived in a mansion of her own, had remarked to an intimate friend, "I hope the little hussy asks him for the family jewels. Chatto's fool enough to try to give them to her!" It was noticed, however, that no new jewels adorned the pretty actress.

Then came the Duke's invitation to several of the Drury Lane company to sup with him one Sunday night at his villa at Richmond. Sally assured herself that three other girls were going, before she said she would be glad to make one of the party. On Sunday evening his Grace's coach rolled her out from London.

The supper was served in a charming room, with long French windows opening on to a sloping lawn that stretched to the Thames. The silver reaches of the river glistened in the moonlight, and the air was

spiced with flowers. The gardens were a delight to the town-girls, and in so far as it could the Duke's supper fitly complemented the brilliant beauty of the night.

His Grace was in a humorous mood, and his guests did their best to keep him in it. The men, young fashionables living on the outskirts of Bohemia, applauded his wit, while they drank abundantly of his famous claret. The girls discreetly left the post of honor to Sally, upon whom the Duke lavished profuse attentions, and whose face was the constant lodestone of his eyes.

Supper ended, the Duke proposed that they should explore his grounds. He drew Sally down toward the river, talking more eloquently than ever, as the fragrance of his wines, his flowers, and his hope of success mounted to his head. He found her a seat, with a wide, appealing view, and from his position beside her assailed her with all the wiles of his long experience in such encounters.

It was a night specially made for yielding to romance, and Sally was inclined to be patient with any Romeo. Her eyes drank in the silver-scattered water, the silver-star-strewn sky, and she sighed for very pleasure in them. But when she listened to the man beside her she heard only the craft of the beast in his honeyed phrasings, and clasped her hands tightly in her lap and kept on guard.

She thought she must have hearkened to that

honeyed tongue for hours, and paid no heed to what it said. She overlooked who he was, and weighed him, man for man, against the worst knave in Pump Lane, and found the knave the better creature. Yet she felt sure enough of herself to endure it, although the enchantment of the night was broken like a cracked bell by the Duke's tributes to her charms.

She rose at last, half regretful to leave such a lovely scene, half wild to fly from it. A white scarf, that was her only headdress, had slipped from her hair, and hung from her shoulders. She crossed the grass with a light, springing tread. "You are Diana indeed," murmured the Duke at her side; "I always think of you so; incomparably fair and free, sweet as a summer night, and stabbing us with your smiles. Some day I will have a sculptor catch you, so I can keep you for myself. There shall be a grotto for you in the park."

"How I will freeze in winter," said Sally, lightly, "if your sculptor catches me like this."

"Then you shall stand in Chatto House instead. There's not a statue nor a portrait there can compare with you, you beauty!"

"I'd feel like the wife of Bluebeard looking at all those other women," she protested.

"They shall all be cleared away when I enthrone you."

"No, no; a woman should be reminded for her

soul's good that she is neither the first in any man's life, nor like to be the last."

"I swear, Sally—" he started.

"Oh, no, save your breath, sir. If I were the first it would only prove your Grace a dullard, and if I were the last a simpleton; and your Grace is neither. A man of taste never confines himself to dark or light coloring," she rattled on; and, as if to protect herself, she turned and laughed in his face.

By this time they had come to the terrace of the villa. The curtains were fluttering before a light breeze as Sally stepped in at one of the French windows. The table at which they had supped had been cleared, and was now decorated with a silver dish of nectarines and grapes, and decanters of port, and glasses.

The Duke filled a glass, and offered it to Sally, but she shook her head. He drank the wine himself, refilled the glass, and set it on the table. "Some fruit," he urged, "at least;" and drew out a chair for her.

"Where are the others?" asked Sally. "It must be time we started back to town."

The Duke smiled, and made her a little bow. "It would be most inhospitable of me to permit you to leave my roof at this hour. You must do me the honor to remain my guest."

Then Sally understood that she had been trapped, and that her companions had been induced to leave

her with this man. Instantly she rallied her innate courage, and smiled as she caught the ends of her scarf in her two hands and knotted them loosely across her bosom. "Your Grace is too considerate," she said lightly. "I'm used to late hours, and if I shouldn't go home my sister and nephew would be very much worried."

"Sally," said the Duke, stepping up to her, "make the villa your home. It and I and all my servants are at your disposing, if you'll only be kind to me. I've thought of nothing but you for a whole month past. How can I let you go when I have you here?"

Still Sally smiled, though his covetous outstretched hands could have touched her. "See," said she, "wouldn't it be better for you to go on thinking of me for a whole month more, than to forget me altogether?"

"Forget you!" he cried. "Forget your eyes, your lips!"

"Yes, forget me, as you have forgotten the other women. Do you remember the eyes and the lips of the last woman who stayed here? She is gone entirely, she means nothing to you. If you would keep me, you must let me go." She was using all her wits now.

"How's that?" he demanded.

Sally laughed; and pointed him to the chair he had offered her. "Let us talk sensibly," she said. "You called me Diana to-night; and perhaps I am like her.

So far I have cared for no man, but when I do I might care a great deal. It will be a serious business for me, I assure you."

The Duke drew back a step, but did not take the chair.

"If I stayed here," went on Sally, "in a month you would have tired of me, and in a month more forgotten me. But if I go you can still try to make me care, care of my own free will, and turn Diana into a different creature. Is that worth the winning?"

"Egad," said the Duke, "there was never a woman like you!"

"Then if I stay, I scorn you; but if I go, you still have a chance to win Diana. Play for the highest stakes, like a true gambler, for surely the stakes are worth the risking."

"Whether you come with love," he said, "or without it?"

She managed to nod, and pulled the knot of her scarf a little tighter.

"It's a fool's game," he murmured.

"It's a wise man's," she contradicted. "Anyone can play the fool, and be sorry; but a man like you—" She gestured the rest.

The Duke caught her eye, and held it. "Egad, it may be you are right," said he, kept in check by her steady gaze. "It may be we would be happier if you came of your own free will—if Diana melted."

"Much happier," she said, "you must see that."

Then very deliberately she slipped the noose of her scarf up over her head, and tucked her hair in under it. "You shall stay here, your Grace, and think it over; and I shall say good-night," she added, smiling. With that she stepped back through the window-space, and out on to the terrace. She seemed calm enough then, but as soon as she gained the shelter of the bushes, she ran like a frightened child.

The stars saw Sally slipping from the villa, a vision of white and silver. She had spent her strength in matching wits with the Duke, and in keeping her show of assurance; her native courage had stood by her, but she had no wish to put it to the test again. She thought the Duke might follow and take her back, or at least call to her that she should have his coach to town, and so she ran on as fast as she could, holding her skirts so that she should not trip, and hoping that she might find some refuge.

The open gates of the villa let the girl into the highroad. As she turned townward she slackened her pace, for now she was almost breathless. Her scarf had caught in a branch and been pulled back from her hair, which fell disordered on her shoulders. She began to consider the situation; she could not hope to get to London at that hour, and the open road was no place for a woman alone. She decided to ask for shelter at the first lighted cottage she should come to.

The first cottage was a low stone house, with a

thatched roof, such as laborers dwell in. A small lighted window on the road side was open, and uncurtained. She looked in, and saw an old woman pouring a cup of tea.

A knock at the door brought the woman to it. She opened it, and saw Sally, lightly gowned, her hair loose, and her face flushed. "I'm in need of shelter," said Sally. "Will you let me stay here till I can go to town at dawn?"

The wrinkled face showed solicitude. "Come in," said the dame, "the road's no place for a lady."

Safely inside, with the door shut behind her, Sally sank down on a chair. "Dearie me," said the woman, "you must have this dish of tea," and she handed Sally her cup.

Sally drank; and after a few minutes felt somewhat recovered. Surer now of her ground, she smiled. "I've missed my friends," she said; "they've gone to town without me. You mustn't put yourself about for me. I only want a corner to spend the night in."

"We be two here," said the dame. "You shall have my son's room. He've just come in a moment since." She opened a door at the rear of the room, and called, "Wilyum, there be a lady here!"

In answer a big fellow, just turned into manhood, came to the door. He looked at Sally, stopped a moment to stare, and then advanced, magnetized by the sight of such loveliness.

"The lady'll have your room, and you'll sleep here, Wilyum," said his mother.

"Aye," said he, staring at Sally's hair, "the lady's welcome."

"It's most kind of you," said Sally, "any place would do."

The woman led her into a little room at the rear, which she started to tidy up. "Please don't," said Sally. "All I want is rest, and a chair would do for that." So she urged the old woman to leave her; and a few minutes later blew out the rushlight and lay down on Wilyum's pallet bed. But the thought of her battle with his Grace of Chatto kept her awake for a long time.

She woke to the crowing of roosters, and made as good a toilet as she could. When she appeared outside she found the dame getting breakfast. Wilyum, who was drawing water at a well, came in at his mother's summons, and the three sat down to table. The country lad's eyes appeared incapable of leaving Sally's face.

Inquiry brought the information that a coach ran to London from a public-house about a half-mile distant. Sally had some silver in a little purse she always carried, safely hidden. Before the sun had been long up she thanked the woman, and started to thank her son. "I be goin' to the coach wi' you," asserted Wilyum; and, although she protested, he would not budge from his plan.

That half-mile walk was, beyond question, a memorable event to Wilyum. Good, simple soul that he was, he found Sally's smile more glorious than the sunshine, her eyes and hair more beautiful than flowers, and her voice sweeter than running water or the song of birds. With mouth partly open, and eyes and ears attentive, he plodded by her side, an humble but profound worshiper. Sally could not but compare Wilyum's chivalric devotion, sincerity itself, with the care of her so lately shown by the wealthiest nobleman in England.

He put her into the coach for town, and she, looking out at the open window, gave him her hand. Wilyum, his uncovered shock of hair seeming never to have known a comb, let Sally's hand rest on his large palm, while he gazed at it as if it were a pearl. Sally gave his hand a squeeze, which brought the blood flooding to his face. "Good-by, Wilyum," said she, "you're a dear, kind soul."

Wilyum stared after the departing coach in a singular elation. When he looked down at the hand she had pressed he wondered at it, as if he did not recognize it for his own.

It was a thoughtful woman who traveled up to town by that coach. She had learned a lesson, and she decided that she would never play with fire again.

She left the coach in Fleet Street, and walked to the Lane. As she turned from the current of the high street into the quiet backwater she heard her-

self hailed, and, looking about, saw Tom Jellett come hurrying from the shop where he worked for the butcher.

"Sally," he cried, "you've given us all a good fright!"

She felt reassured at the sight of him, like a storm-tossed traveler at the view of harbor. But she was too proud to tell him what had happened, and she feared the effect of it on Kate and Gilbert. "I spent the night with friends in the country," she said. But she could not help adding, "Oh, Tom, how sweet the Lane looks now!"

He fell into step at her side as she walked over the rough paving. The ill-assorted houses, mean as they were, stretched to either side like sheltering arms. The two reached Sally's door, and she leaned for a moment against the wooden panel.

"There be so many perils for a girl like you," said Jellett, gently, as if echoing her thoughts. "Mightn't you be happy if you married me? I'm truer than the folk you meet with at the theatre."

"Yes, you are, Tom," she agreed, letting her eyes rest on him. For a moment she was sorely tempted to say yes, to feel his arms about her, and be assured that she had found protection. She knew that it was the simple folk, like Tom, and Kate, and Gilbert, and Wilyum, and his mother, upon whom she could most safely count. She had tested that in the days of the plague.

But she could not yield only to a man's power of protection; she needed to give as well as to receive. She turned her head from Jellett, and looked in the direction of Pump Court. "I'm afraid I couldn't do it, Tom," she said very gently.

"Is there another man?" he asked, quietly.

"I don't know, Tom. Sometimes I wonder—but I don't know. I must wait. I can't cheat you—I can't cheat the two of us—no matter how I'm tempted."

"It's weary business, this waiting."

"But we must wait," said Sally, shaking her head.

"And a right dangerous business, too," observed Jellett, obstinately.

"There are so many kinds of dangers," she answered, "but some we must not run away from."

When Tom had left, she still stood leaning against the door for some minutes. "So dangerous—" she whispered, "but we can't always run away—some we must face—if we're to win at all."

In her eyes was deep reverie, as if she were communing with unaccustomed thoughts. And in fact she was seeing her world in the light of new experiences, such as were changing the willful girl into the patient woman.

XVIII

GROTE GIVES CHASE

THE Lane was in midsummer, when something of fragrance and glamour contrives to steal even into the crowded heart of town. Geraniums did well in window-pots then, and a thrush, if one had the heart to imprison him, would bring a bit of the sky beneath one's roof. Folks thawed in the fine weather; even Mistress Kilgore, sitting on a bench beneath her window, let her head rest against her man's shoulder, and pulled his arm about her waist. Swains sought out their summer affinities, and promenaded, arms entwined, through the darkening street. To be sure, one couple was only John, the tanner's boy, with little Bess Padstow, the maid at the Bear and Staff, but the summer night was theirs as much as it was the elegant Count D'Orsay's and Lady Blessington's.

Oliver Pipe sat with Grote in front of the smithy, regarding the passers-by. The smith still felt considerable awe of his assistant, but the awe was by now tempered with a strong affection. When the landlord's agent, Talbot, had unaccountably raised

the rent on Pipe's house and shop, Grote had insisted on paying the extra charge for him. "He did it because I was surly," Grote explained; and concluded the matter in his positive manner. But it was little tricks and traits of Grote's gradually showing character that had won the old smith's regard.

"Conrad," said Pipe, as they sat in the Court that evening, "the mating time's here again. Have ye never seen a lass ye fancied? Why should ye sit with an old man, and watch the others pass, lad and lass, man and woman, through the Lane?"

A smile stole into Grote's eyes. "Do you set such a high value on this mating?" he asked.

"There's nothing like it," Pipe answered. "Look yon—little Bess there's more to John than all the gold of Indy."

Grote watched the pair as they, unconscious of anything but each other, came across the Court. "But it's a ticklish concern," he observed. "Now the wise man—"

"Drat your wisdom!" broke in Pipe. "Leave wisdom to the fools!"

"I did that long ago," said Grote; "and have to buy it back now, bit by bit."

"You could find a maid," said the smith, ignoring this remark. "You're not such an ill-featured fellow, and I've seen several girls loiter by the door. You're stiff in the neck, and sometimes monstrous full of pride; but that can be overcome."

"I'm all you say, stiff-necked as a musket; but I think I'm learning."

Yet, notwithstanding such talks as this, Grote kept away from feminine society. When Gilbert came to see him they sat outdoors in the Court, and talked of history and travel and like matters, but never of human affections. Such personal subjects, it appeared, were beyond the scope of either man's speculations.

Meanwhile Sally, having clearly in mind that night at Richmond, was now very circumspect. Many a summer afternoon she spent at the window of her own house, rather than run the risk of meeting the Duke, if she sought Park or Gardens. She could not avoid him altogether at the theatre, for he was too great a man to be denied admission behind the scenes, but she took care that he never found her alone, nor succeeded in driving her companions away. When she left the theatre she always sought the company of some fellow-player who went her way, and tried to make sure that the Duke was not in the neighborhood.

Chatto, however, constantly sent her notes, fastened to the handles of magnificent bouquets. "You are not playing the game fair with me, Diana," one note read; "how can I sue to a goddess I never see?" And another upbraided her for spurning such devotion as he offered. "I would never have dreamed it possible," he wrote, "that beauty could be so made

of ice, or woman so torture a man as thought of you does me." Sally tore up the notes, and gave the flowers to the wardrobe mistress.

She thought the Duke's ardor must have cooled after a month of this treatment, and breathed a little freer. She heard that he had gone to the country, and for several nights she went only part way home from Drury Lane with a friend, and the rest of the way alone. Then, one evening, as she was nearing the head of Pump Lane, she met Talbot, the landlord's agent, in the high street. "Good evening, Mistress Temple," said he, with a sweep of his hat. "Good even," she answered civilly; and would have passed, but he barred the way, asking some questions.

There were few people about at the moment. A lad sat on a nearby doorstep. A coach came lumbering down the ill-lighted road. Talbot asked about some repairs to Kate's house. The coach stopped, its door opened, and two men stepped out into the dark street. Before Sally knew what was happening a cloak was thrown over her head, her cry was muffled in it, and she was carried struggling to the coach-door. The lad jumped up with a yell; but already the coach was speeding into the darkness. On the paving-stones lay a little handbag of blue satin.

Such affairs had been known to happen in London before, and prudence would have dictated a discreet shrug of the shoulders, and a few mumbled impreca-

tions on the part of a single eye-witness. This observer, however, was too much thrilled and enraptured to think of prudence. He had heard of the mad pranks of young blades known as Mohocks, who were little less than pirates of the town; and he felt a compelling interest in the affairs of all pirates. He snatched up the little handbag, and ran with it to the flickering lamp that was still burning before the butcher's shop.

The boy opened the bag, and drew out a small handkerchief, two shillings, a threepence, and three pennies, a packet of pins, and a piece of paper. The paper had some writing on it, but the lad was no scholar.

Inside the shop a big man was cleaning up for the night. The lad knew the man was the Byberry Boy, who had knocked out the famous Bombardier at Shrewsbury Fair, and he had even heard the hero recount the story of that surpassing triumph. Sticking the handbag into the breast of his jacket, he marched into the shop. "Please, Mr. Jellett, can you tell me what that says?" he asked, thrusting out the scrap of paper.

Jellett studied the writing. "It says 'Sally Temple: her bag,'" said he. "What be it doing here?"

The boy shook his head, and considered the paper doubtfully. "It don't say where she lives?" he queried.

"No; but I can tell you where she lives," said Jellett. "The seventh house down Pump Lane, to the right."

"Thank you," said the boy, and left the butcher's shop.

So near Tom Jellett came to tracking the coach through the night.

The boy went down Pump Lane to the seventh house on the right. The night was warm, and the lower windows here were open. He saw a man reading by a candle, and called softly to him. "See what I've found," he said, drawing the little bag from his jacket.

Gilbert Stanes, who sometimes sat up for Sally on summer evenings, came over to the window. "What's that?" he said, leaning on the sill.

"Sally Temple: her bag," repeated the boy, and thrust the bag forward, perhaps from honesty, perhaps from a desire to have a hand in the night's adventure.

Gilbert took the bag, and looked at it. "Yes, it's Sally's," he agreed. "How'd you come by it?"

The lad hesitated a second, and then said rapidly, "I was sitting in the door, an' she come by, an' a man was talking to her, an' a coach come up, an' two men got out, an' they caught her up, an' they put her in the coach, an' it drove away, an' I found the bag with the paper in it."

"What's that?" cried Gilbert. The boy started

again; but Gilbert stopped him. "Never mind that," said he; "which way did they go?"

The boy pointed vaguely to the west.

Gilbert seized his crutch, and hobbled into the Lane. "What shall I do? What shall I do?" he muttered. "Something quick."

He glanced up and down the deserted street, and then, without a word to the wondering boy, started as fast as he could go toward Pump Court.

The harness shop and the smithy were dark, but Gilbert beat on the door with his crutch. Presently a head appeared from a window under the eaves. "What do you want?" demanded Oliver Pipe's voice.

"Call Conrad!" entreated Gilbert. "It's I, Gilbert Stanes."

The head disappeared, and shortly after the door of the smithy opened, and Grote stepped out. Behind him peered the smith.

"Sally's gone!" cried Gilbert. "Some villains caught her up, and took her off in a coach. It went to the west. Think for me, Conrad, think!"

"Yes, yes," said Grote; "let me see."

"Save Sally, Conrad; save her," Gilbert begged.

"You don't know who the men were?"

"No; some of the beasts who hunt our women—oh, help Sally, Conrad!"

Grote's hand caught Gilbert's arm. "I'll bring her back," he assured the cripple, and ran up the dark Lane.

When he came into the high street Grote's pace slackened, for he had much thinking to do. The town lay all about him, a vast cobweb of streets and alleys, through which it was, of course, quite impossible for him to trace a coach. He must attack the problem from the other end.

By the time he reached the Strand he had hit on a plan. He kept on westward through streets that began to show more lights, and where more people were abroad. Presently he encountered two young macaronis strolling from the opposite direction. He stopped before them. "I ask your pardon," he said, "but could you direct me to the Cocoa Tree?"

The two dandies halted, and examined him narrowly.

"The Cocoa Tree," drawled one, "is down the next corner, turn to the left and a dozen paces." "With four little windows in the front, and a devilish big door," added the other.

"You'd best stop away from it," warned the first, "that's a good bit of advice for you." "Wish we'd taken the advice ourselves, don't we, George?" put in his friend, as they walked on.

Grote followed their directions, and found the big door, and the row of little windows. The latter were all lighted, and the door stood open to the summer warmth. He entered, to be stopped by a footman, who demanded his business. "Is the Earl of Dorset here?" asked Grote.

"His Lordship is in the country," answered the lackey.

"Is Sir John Gorham here?" pursued Grote.

"Sir John left an hour ago."

"His town address, then?" Grote's tone was imperative.

"I don't know it," said the footman.

To his vast surprise the stranger strode past him, and into the card-room on the right.

Half-a-dozen gentlemen sat at play there. At Grote's entrance some looked up, and one, who held a pack of cards, checked his dealing to stare at the tall, dark man.

"I ask your pardon," said Grote, "but I must find Sir John Gorham at once. Can any of you tell me where he lives?"

"In Jermyn Street, number twelve," said one. "What's amiss with Jack?"

Grote did not stop to answer. He hurried out of the Cocoa Tree, and headed for Jermyn Street.

The master of number twelve had not yet gone to bed when there came a sharp rapping at his outer door. He was reclining in one luxurious chair, with his feet overhanging another, and reading the first volume of the popular novel "The History of Clarissa Harlowe." His man informed him that a stranger desired a few words with him, and the amiable baronet ordered the stranger admitted.

Sir John looked up at the tall, spare, black-haired

man, dressed in sober brown of the quality worn by artisans and tradesmen, who entered his sitting-room. Something in his visitor's searching eyes puzzled him, but the man gave him small time for reflection.

"My errand will doubtless seem very odd to you, Sir John," said the stranger. "But it's very serious to me, and to some others."

"Sit down," invited Sir John, wondering what the man could be coming to.

The other ignored the invitation. "This is it," said he. "You are acquainted with Mistress Sally Temple."

Sir John smiled, a trifle evasively, as if unwilling to commit himself too far. "I have the honor of an acquaintance with her," he admitted.

"You also know the gossip of town," continued the visitor. "Tell me, who is the man who is pursuing Mistress Temple?"

"Who are you?" said Sir John, removing his feet from the chair, and sitting up straighter.

"A man who lives in Pump Lane, and who is a friend of hers."

"And more than that, perhaps?" suggested Sir John, hoping to draw the stranger out.

The man scowled. "A friend, I said," he asserted, in a tone that was scarcely usual from an artisan to a baronet.

"Why should I answer your questions?" inquired Sir John.

"Because—" the other began brusquely; and then checked himself. "Because Mistress Temple is in danger."

"Danger!" exclaimed Sir John. "What do you mean?"

"Who is pursuing her?" demanded the visitor, ignoring the question.

"Why, who but the Devil's own Duke of Chatto, the old Red Fox. That's what people say."

"The Duke of Chatto!" cried the stranger, his eyes swiftly ablaze. "Where does he live?"

"In Chatto House, on Hyde Park Terrace. But what are you thinking of, man?"

"Of catching his neck in my two hands."

"You fool! He's the richest noble in England, and you're a workingman!"

The other man's eyes were wicked. "But we'll be man to man when we meet," said he; "noble or not!" He looked as if he reveled in the prospect. "My thanks are yours, Sir John." With that he was out of the room, and out of the house.

Sir John stood up and paced the floor, quizzing his memory. Presently an idea flashed upon him, and he stopped. "I have it, I have it!" he cried eagerly. "That brow, those eyes, that voice! The masterful man! I remember how he praised my news of Hawkins, the prize-fighter. What was it?—'Blood and brawn!'—that's it. And the wonderful fight at Chantrey! The raging devil—he looked the

same way now! So he followed her to Pump Lane, and turned workman!" Sir John folded his arms, and considered. "For love of pretty Sally, pretty Sally Temple. Damme, he is a man, after all! And he'll win her yet with his dogged persistence! That's the real thing for you; how few of us have the sense to see it." He walked to the window, frowning. "He'll go straight for Chatto! What a meeting that will be! Someone's going to have a most unpleasant time of it; and I should say that the odds were all in favor of that someone being Chatto!"

XIX

A NIGHT'S EVENTS IN A GREAT HOUSE

VIRTUE and vice were sleeping to either side of him as Conrad Grote shot comet-wise through the warm summer night. He took no time for reckoning nor for planning; he threw all consideration from him as thoughtlessly as a runner would fling off a cloak that slowed his speed. He was afire with the desire for action, and all his energies and all his passions were but fuel to that fire. Petty matters such as the detaining hand of the night-watch, or the accosting voice of a woman, would have whistled past him like the wind.

Vice and virtue lay abed, while Grote possessed the night. The hour was like some climax his life had been leading to, the great adventure that lured and beckoned and was forever dancing on ahead. A wild joy throbbed in his veins, and sang in his ears. He sprang on, trusting to an early knowledge of London to guide him to the house he sought.

He knew the mansion on Hyde Park Terrace by its vast and pompous portico. Struck by the insolence of its great columns, he beat upon the door as

if he were disfiguring a haughty face. Again and again he pounded. At last the door was opened by a footman in a great powdered wig, who peered out at him from a dimly-lighted hall.

"I must see his Grace, instanter," declared Grote, "on most urgent business."

"His Grace is occupied," answered the footman.

"This news will not wait," said Grote. "He will be glad to see me."

"I might take your name to him," temporized the footman, impressed by Grote's peremptory manner.

"He would not want you to know it," was the quick reply. "My business is of a very secret nature. It concerns a lady."

The footman knew that his master was continually seriously interested in that sex, and that such affairs were naturally very private. "Wait here a moment," he said, "while I speak to Hubert;" and hurried away in the direction of the steward's offices.

As soon as the footman was out of sight Grote crossed the hall to the great marble staircase. He climbed its height, and found himself in a gallery. Many doors gave on to this, some shut, and some standing wide. He opened each door and looked in; the rooms were either dark, or, if lighted, unoccupied. But as he turned the knob of the last door on the right side of the gallery he caught the sound of a voice, and smiled, and nodded to himself.

He pushed this door open very gently, and stepped

into a spacious chamber. The carpet was of a thick pile, and hid his footsteps. He shut the door, and turned the key in the lock.

A long mahogany table at the farther end of the apartment bore four massive candlesticks, and the candles lighted a little scene there, leaving the rest of the great room in comparative darkness. At one side of the table stood Sally, every line of her face and figure showing furious anger, while a few feet beyond her, his arms akimbo, stood the Duke of Chatto. It was his voice that Grote had heard. Suddenly Chatto broke off abruptly, and glared across the room.

"What's this?" he cried savagely. "Get out of here!"

For answer Grote walked to the nearer side of the long table, his black eyes, very bright, never shifting from Chatto's face.

The owner of the house stamped his foot, and scowled with rage. "Get out of here, I tell you!" he thundered. "What fool let you into my rooms? What do you want?"

The candles showed the red countenance of Chatto, and his brilliant blue and silver coat, and across the table lighted the dull brown jacket of Grote and his dark, threatening face.

"I have come for Mistress Temple," said Grote. "I mean to take her home."

Chatto's face grew purplish, and his small eyes

blinked rapidly as he leaned on the table with both fists and stared at the other man.

"Where have I seen you before?" he demanded.

"At the smithy in Pump Lane. I'm a neighbor of Mistress Temple."

"That was it; I remember your ugly face. Now get out of here before I have you thrown out!"

Grote's hands took a tighter grip on his leather belt, but he kept his temper. "I will go when Mistress Temple goes," said he; "and she is ready to go now."

"She is not ready to go!" cried Chatto. "She is my guest, and will stay here in my house. What do you want? Money? Or cheaper rent for your smithy? I'll have you turned out for this night's work. Get away, before I promise to whip you out of London!"

Sally's eyes, unnaturally large in her white face, were fixed on Grote.

"Promise whatever you like," said Grote. "I'm not thinking of to-morrow. We are two men here, and I've come to take this woman home with me."

Sally started forward; but Chatto caught her by the wrist. "Stay where you are," he snarled. He glared again at Grote. "If you're in love with her," he went on, "I'll buy you off. I'll pay you well for her. Mistress Temple will be better off with me, she shall have whatever she wants." He tried to appear conciliatory. "There, that's best for us all. She

and I were coming to an agreement when you broke in."

"Oh, don't believe him!" cried Sally; and with an effort she wrenched her arm free from Chatto's grasp. "He knows how I hate him! He had me bound and brought here!"

"There's her answer," said Grote, his eyes glinting as he faced the Duke. "By rights it should be driven down your throat, but that takes time. Come, Mistress Temple, we'll be going." He stepped toward her, holding out his hand.

"You cub of Satan!" roared Chatto. "She shall stay, and you shall go! A mean smith to beard me in my own house! I'll have you thrown from the window!" He stretched out his hand to a bell-rope that hung at the side of the chimney-breast behind him, and gave it a great pull.

At the same instant Grote wheeled about, and leaned across the table that separated them. "Rouse your men!" he cried. "For, by Heaven! you'll need them!" and he caught Chatto's cheek a blow with his right hand.

The Duke bellowed with rage, and seized one of the great bronze candlesticks in both hands. He swung it high over his head, and then hurled it at Grote, who dodged in the nick of time. The candlestick fell with a heavy thud upon the floor.

Sally had jumped back from the table, and now Grote, catching hold of one end of the mahogany,

behind which the Duke was partly sheltered, gave it a great shove so that the remaining candlesticks fell this way and that. One candle still burned on the floor, and Sally snatched it from the holder and held it so that Grote might see.

"Help!" roared Chatto, and pulled a knife from under his coat. He struck out wildly with it, but Grote jumped to one side, and as the other called and jabbed he ran in and caught the Duke's arms and pinned them to his side and threw him to the floor. They fell together, Grote on top. They lay between the table and the fireplace, thrashing on the carpet that partly broke their fall. Chatto gave a great heave of shoulders and body, and his hands clutched at the back of Grote's jacket. But Grote tightened his hold, and then with a sudden jerk wrenched his arms free and caught the Duke's throat in his fingers. He shook the man's head against the floor, his fingers gripped the man's throat, he twisted Chatto from side to side and then flung his head down again and fairly crushed the breath out of his body. Chatto lay still, and Grote got to his feet, shaking with his fury.

There were blows on the door, and a hubbub of voices outside. Grote looked at Sally, who still stood with the candle in her trembling hand. "Put that out," he said, "and stand close to that wall yonder. When you see your chance slip out through the door."

"But you—" she began.

"I can fight a hundred. Do as I say."

She blew out the candle, and ran to the place he had pointed out to her.

Grote stepped to the other side of the table and picked up one of the heavy bronze candlesticks. The door was breaking now under the blows of an axe; it crashed in, and there was a rush of men armed with swords and billets.

"Where is your Grace?" cried one. "What's happened?" called another.

"His Grace is over here by the hearth," said Grote. "He needs you badly."

In the light from the hall they saw only one man before them, and came toward him. Grote saw Sally slip out through the doorway, and he clutched the candlestick tighter and stepped forward.

"His Grace is there on the floor," said he. "Go look to him!"

But now they understood, and with angry cries turned on Grote. A pistol cracked, the shot flew by him; then the pack was on him, eager to pull him down.

Grote swung the candlestick like a mace, heavy end up, and brought it down on one man's head. He fell like a log. With oaths and yells the others closed in, striking and thrusting and battering at their single enemy. He was struck on the shoulder and the arm, a blow at his leg almost tumbled him. Still

he gritted his teeth and swung the candlestick, fighting his way forward to the door.

A mace is a terrible weapon, wielded by a desperate man, and the candlestick was terrible in the hands of Grote. But the men struck at his knees and legs and some of their blows reached him and made him stagger and bend. Yet though he staggered, and could scarcely see because the blood from a cut on his forehead got into his eyes, and his breath was short, and his head spinning, he crashed onward, beating and knocking and felling his enemies with every blow of his bronze stick. Up and down it raged, and they fell back, and cursed, and tried to run in under it. So, stumbling and panting and thrashing like a windmill in a gale, he gained the door at last, still on his feet.

He heard the yells of rage behind him, he steadied himself, and, still clutching the candlestick, ran down the hall. He caught at the marble balustrade of the great staircase and plunged down the steps. He dashed across the hall, and wrenching at the door, pulled it open. A figure that had been watching in the shadows of a corner of the hall followed, pulled the door shut after her, turned the key she held, and flung it away. Then she too ran out wildly from the great columns of Chatto House on to the starlit terrace.

Stopping a second to look and listen, the woman thought she saw a figure swaying along the roadway

to the left and heard steps in that direction. She hurried after the vision, tripped and nearly fell over stones that had been left to guard a hole, and when she looked again found that the figure she sought had disappeared. With a little cry of distress she ran on, passed by the portico of another noble mansion, felt her feet on the soft grass of a lawn, and saw a tree standing sentinel-like before her. She stopped; under the tree lay a man, a sprawling figure. She stooped, and, recognizing him in the dim starlight, sank down on her knees beside him.

"Conrad," she murmured, "oh, my dear Conrad!" He opened his eyes, and she bent lower over his white face. "Where are you hurt most?" she whispered.

He shut his eyes and turned his head a little sideways. It seemed that he was hurt everywhere, a cut on his brow was bleeding, his torn coat showed a bloody shoulder, and one outstretched arm was doubled as with pain.

She sat back on bent knees, seeing him as he had come plunging down the stairs and through the hall, as he must have come whirling through the Duke's men, his face desperate, the bronze weapon swinging in his hand. She saw that his fingers still clung to the candlestick lying by him.

Then she thought she heard a noise in the road to the right, and crouched, scarcely daring to breathe. But the noise stayed some distance off; and she bent again over Grote and brushed his black hair

gently back from the cut on his forehead, and tore a piece of muslin from the sleeve of her gown and put it over the wound to stanch the blood. So close to him the stars showed her each line of the face she knew so well, had seen in so many widely differing places; she looked at the scar that crossed his upper lip, and leaned still closer to him. "It's I, Sally Temple," she whispered. "I'm here with you. Open your eyes a moment."

He obeyed her voice, and looked up at her.

"We're safe now," she whispered, "but I must leave you to get help. I won't be long about it. Do you understand?"

"Yes," he answered.

She hovered above him, loath to leave him. She eased his battered shoulder. Then she stood up, and stepping out into the road looked both ways. The night was quiet now; even Chatto House in the distance seemed undisturbed and still.

She had spoken hopefully of getting help, but she knew that would be a difficult matter in such a place at such an hour of night. Yet the two of them must not be found there at dawn, and dawn was not very far distant. She went down the road, silent now save for her own footsteps, which sounded appallingly loud. It seemed to her that London must be deserted, for she turned one corner after another without meeting anyone.

Presently she saw a man shambling along on the

opposite side of the way. He looked like a derelict, fitter to ask aid than to give it, and she let him pass without a word. She was not frightened at him; she had experienced too much that night to be frightened by any vagrant of the streets.

Next she found two women, walking rapidly and arm in arm, as if for safety. They could give no help, and she let them hurry by, unheeding the curious glances they leveled at her. Then, rounding a corner, she caught the sound of wheels, and ran in that direction. She came up with a cart, jogging along under the guidance of a man who swayed about on the seat as though half drunk with sleep.

The cart-driver found himself hailed by a woman's voice, and pulled up and looked about. The woman ran up to him. "I need help badly," she said; "a man's been hurt and lies bleeding; I'll pay you well if you'll fetch him home. Please, for mercy's sake! I'll pay you well."

"What'll you pay?" asked the driver.

"Eight, ten shillings—to take him to Pump Lane."

"Say twelve, and I'll do it," said the driver, his cupidity roused.

"Twelve shillings, then—only hurry!" and the woman jumped to the hub and then to the wheel, and into the cart before the man could think what she was doing.

"This way," she said, laying her hands on the reins.

"Sit still," he ordered, "and mind that board you sit on. It rocks about when the nag goes fast."

She pointed him out the turnings, continually urging him to greater speed. "Easy now, easy," he kept admonishing her. "The beast be like to stumble in the dark." So they jogged on by the way she had come, and finally stopped before the tree where she had left Grote. "You'll have to help me lift him up," she said, and slipped down and ran to the tree.

Grote lay there, and she bent over him, whispering. "Here's help at last," she said. "Oh, can you move a little? We must get you to the cart." Very carefully she lifted him until he was leaning against her knee. His eyes were wide open, and he managed a faint smile. "Wait," he said, "there—" and he pulled himself up straighter.

With the aid of the driver Sally helped Grote to his feet, and one on either side they got him to the cart. The driver found some empty gunny-sacks for him to lie on, and Sally rested his head against her shoulder.

"To Pump Lane," she directed, as the man clambered up to his seat. "And, oh! be careful not to jolt too much."

Sally sat with her back against the board of the driver's seat, one arm supporting Grote. Occasionally her soft fingers touched the strip of muslin that had stopped the flow of blood from his cut forehead, and once or twice she eased his wounded shoul-

der against her breast. He rested there like a spent child, and she, remembering other days, smiled a little now and then.

They drove through the empty city as the summer dawn was sending its first faint signals into the sky. They came to the Lane, deserted except for the eyes of windows, and finally up to the smithy door in the Court. At the sound of the wheels two men had started out. "Is it Sally?" cried one, Gilbert, his voice all trembling.

"Yes, it's Sally," the woman answered, "and Conrad too. But he's hurt, Gilly; have a care of him."

The three men helped Grote from the cart into the smithy. Oliver Pipe brought a bottle of brandy, and after a drink of that Grote grew stronger. Meantime Sally got her twelve shillings from the smith and paid the driver, who drove away, grinning at the night's good fortune.

Grote lay on a pile of skins near the smithy hearth. When Sally came in again he raised himself on one elbow, and then sat up. She knelt beside him, her face full of tender care. "What a wonderful man you are, Conrad," she said, "the bravest in all the world!"

His dark eyes fastened on her, and his hand caught hers. "Do you think so?" he said eagerly. "Then I could fight all the devils of this world and the next."

"I think you have fought them already," she an-

swered, "and beaten them. Oh, I can't tell you what I think—not now."

"You will come to-morrow?" he begged.

She nodded, her eyes wonderfully luminous as they looked into his. "Yes, I will come to-morrow, and whenever you have need of me." Then she drew her hand away from his, and rising quickly, went to Gilbert, who was waiting for her at the door. Dawn was already lighting the Court and Lane.

XX

THE DRAMA IN PUMP COURT

THE sun had almost completed his journey next day before Sally woke. She had slept most convincingly when once she started, which was not immediately on going to bed. So much rested that she felt almost made anew, she rose and looked out through her little window. It was late afternoon, and her conscience smote her, and more than her conscience; so much might have happened since she and Gilbert had climbed the stairs at daybreak. On a chair lay the gown she had worn, crumpled, grass-stained, with part of one sleeve torn away, and a dark patch where Grote's cut shoulder had rested against it. Quickly she made her toilet, choosing a new gown, and stopping in front of her glass only for a minute. When she went downstairs she found to her relief that Kate was out, and so she might be saved long explanations. Perhaps Kate had slept blissfully through the night, or perhaps Gilbert had told her something of what had happened—in any event Sally had no need to answer the questions of her sister.

She made herself a cup of tea, and breakfasted or supped on a slice of ham and bread. Then she found a piece of paper and pencil in a box of Gilbert's and scribbled a note to the manager at Drury Lane Theatre—she was unwell, and asked that the woman who understudied her part should take her place that evening. Looking from her door she caught sight of two boys she knew shooting marbles in the Lane, and she called to one of them and gave him sixpence to take her note at once to the manager at the theatre.

Her eyes were very bright as she stepped out into the Lane, and her thoughts so absorbing that she did not notice that men and women were looking curiously at her, and whispering to each other after she had passed them. For in some manner, through Oliver Pipe or Gilbert, but probably through the old smith, word had gone about that the Duke of Chatto had kidnapped Sally Temple, and that she had been rescued from Chatto House only after a desperate battle between the Duke himself and Conrad Grote. That was a story indeed—one that made the blood boil and the fingers clench. But Sally was too much absorbed to catch the echoes of it.

She stopped at the door of the harness-shop instead of going to the smithy. Opening the door she found Oliver Pipe threading a needle. "How is Conrad?" she asked eagerly. The smith looked up and smiled. "Oh, Sally, my dear, it's you, is it? Conrad's doing well; he be remarkable tough. He were

covered with bruises, but I washed 'em out and bound 'em up, and he's slept and eaten. He's not pretty to look on, but he's there, resting on the bench in the smithy. Go talk to him, my dear."

Sally went by old Oliver, and through the doorway that separated the shop from the smithy. She stood still a moment, looking at the man who half sat, half reclined on the bench, his head partly turned from her. A bandage hid the cut on his forehead, and his face was gaunt and gray.

"He says you're feeling stronger," she said in a voice that tried to hide its sudden shaking.

The man on the bench turned and looked at her, his eyes eager and hungry. "Strong enough," he answered, "strong enough."

There was a new light in Sally's face as she went toward him, but before she reached him she shut her eyes a second as if to guard herself. "How is the head, and the shoulder, and all the rest of you?" she asked quickly, and sat down on the pile of skins beside the bench.

"They're mending," he answered. "Oliver's a good nurse."

"It's I who should nurse you," she said softly. "You have helped so many people—Gilbert, and the others during the plague, and now me. I should like to watch over you, to fix your bandages, and get your food, and do whatever I could. It's little enough for one who has done so much—oh, little enough in-

deed." She spoke rapidly, eagerly, keeping her eyes from him, as if putting off some impending crisis.

"You have done a great deal for me; you have shown me what a woman is."

"Be careful of your shoulder—you'll rub it against the bench."

"All those days of the plague I was learning a little from you, Sally; and last night more."

"Isn't that bandage too tight?" She made as if she would reach up to his brow to fix it; but did not on second thoughts, and sat back on the pile of skins, her eyes hidden from him, a fleeting smile on her lips.

Into the silence that had fallen between them came the sound of voices from out-doors, a murmur of voices that was not loud, but slowly came in growing volume through the open windows of the smithy. It was so strange a noise that it sounded ominous, and Sally rose to her knees, listening, and then stood up and went to the nearer window. The Court outside was golden with the sunset, and peaceful to the eye, but there was noise in the Lane, and heads were being thrust from the windows of the Bear and Staff opposite to see what the sound might be.

Then there rode into the Court a man on a sleek black horse, a heavy man with a red face and small greenish eyes, who wore a thick silk stock about his neck, and sat as if he would be very careful about moving. Beside him rode a dark-browed man with a

great beak of a nose, and close at their heels were a dozen men in russet livery, some with pikes, and some with stout staffs, and one with a coil of rope. After them flocked men, women, and children, muttering and growling and jeering at the strangers.

"It's the Duke—come for you!" cried Sally, in swift terror, and she sprang back to the man on the bench, her arms outstretched.

Grote stood up. "I never feared any man," he said, and picked up a hammer that lay on the anvil.

"He has men with him, a troop of them!" she cried. "You must get away by the window at the back—I can keep him off long enough for that!"

"And leave you?" he said. "And Oliver? And fly from such a crew? No, you must let me speak with him once more."

She stood between Grote and the door, her arms spread out to bar him. "No, no—not again, Conrad, not again!"

Chatto sat his horse in the middle of the Court. "Where is the smith?" he demanded; "where is the black-haired limb of Satan? I've come to whip him out of London!" As he spoke he caught at his thick stock with his hand as if his throat hurt him.

Old Oliver stepped from the door of the harness-shop. "I am the smith, your Grace," he said. "What do you want with me?"

"Not you—I want the other—to tan his hide! Fetch him out to me, men!"

The crowd were booing and growling, and some were muttering "The ugly beast!" and "The damned robber!" and other remarks that expressed their opinion of his Grace of Chatto. The Duke, however, and the other horseman and the liveried servants paid no attention to the scowls and murmurs, and three of the men-at-arms went to the door of the smithy as their master bade.

"I must speak with him," Grote said to Sally; and she read in his face that his mind was set on this, and so, though very reluctantly, stood away from the door.

Grote opened it and walked out, and at sight of him the Pump Lane people stopped their muttering. His head was bandaged, and a great bump on his left shoulder showed that it was bandaged too, but his eyes were piercing bright.

"At last, you devil!" cried Chatto, shaking his fist in a spasm of fury. "I'll teach you a lesson now; I'll have you bound, and flog you out of town! I'll show you how I handle curs that bite! And all in sight of that woman there behind you—she shall see you go!" His face was fairly corded with his spleen.

Then a deep voice boomed out, Tom Jellett's voice. "Will you see Conrad Grote whipped, men? Will you stand that?"

There came a storm of "No!" from women as well as men, and hisses and curses on the Duke.

"You rats!" snarled Chatto. "If any of you lifts

a finger to help him I'll turn you out of your homes, I'll throw you all in the street! Lay hands on him, men, and bind him!"

But Grote took a step forward, and there was something in his face that held the men back. He looked at Chatto as if they two were alone. "I nearly killed you last night," said he, "and if you touch me I will kill you now. You should be killed, coward, ravisher, bully. Because you are noble you think yourself a god, treat your tenants like vermin, steal their daughters, beat their sons. I tell you to your face that if you lay hands on man or woman here I will raise a cry that will drive you out of England, I will hound you down and wipe you from the earth, I will show you no mercy!"

The crowded Court stood spellbound as the man, shaking his smith's hammer, poured forth his fierce denunciation. None had ever seen such a man before, nor heard such a voice. Chatto's face was livid, his eyes bulging, his under-lip caught in his teeth. "You!" he screamed. "You—a whelp of a smith! By God, I'll have you hung!" He lifted his shaking hand, pointing it at the man in front of him.

"Stop!" said the latter. "You doubt me! Then hear this—I'm not Grote the smith, I'm the Marquis of Romsey; the Black Romsey, have you ever heard of him? I can fight you how you will, with my hands, or with men and might and money. I can do all I say, make your name a hissing and a loathing. Set

your men on, and I'll show all England what a foul thing you are!"

Chatto's hand dropped to his saddle. "The Marquis of Romsey!" he muttered. "That crazy beast!" And he added, considering the other's face, "It might be he."

"I am he," said the dark man. "Put it to the test. Crazy beast if you like, but still Romsey."

Chatto turned his head to the horseman who sat beside him, and a roar of delight went up from the crowd in the Court. "It be Lord Romsey for certain!" Jellett shouted to Oliver Pipe. "I've seen those fighting eyes of his before!"

The roar stung Chatto, and he looked at the crowd about him. "I'll have your homes for this," he said blackly. "Get out of them to-night, or I'll have you emptied out to-morrow! I'll not have such scum for tenants."

"Then I'll buy the houses from you," said Romsey, "and the scum will be better off. A thousand pounds for Lane and Court."

"No, no," said Chatto, "they're mine."

"Or the story of last night at Chatto House goes to the courts," said Romsey, "and we'll see what the law will make of such villainy."

The Duke pulled at his stock, looked away, caught sight of Sally, and looked back at Romsey. "I'll sell you the kennels," he said, "and my curses into the bargain, and that woman there, too. She's—"

He never finished his sentence, for the man in front of him swung the hammer to his shoulder. Chatto swerved to one side, caught his throat as if in pain, and with a muttered curse turned his horse's head and pushed his way through the crowd. Back of him came his men, now lacking the insolent assurance of their first appearance, and behind them the people of the Court and Lane, as if they meant to see the Duke surely on his way from the neighborhood of their homes.

The man with the bandaged head turned and went in at the door of the smithy. His face was very weary, and he let the hammer drop to the floor. The sun had set by now, and only the afterglow lighted the rude room and its rough furnishings. The man stood still a minute or two, looking at the floor, and then glanced up. Not far away Sally was watching him.

"Black Romsey to the last," said he. "You know me now, the bitter fighting man. Hate is my portion, passion my only strength."

"But you are Conrad Grote," she said in a low voice, "the man who stood by all of us in need."

"And Romsey too, who drove you out of Cumnor by his rage."

"I've forgotten him," she said. "No, never quite forgotten him;—but come to see so much more of the other." She came a little nearer. "Tell me, Conrad, what do you think of me?"

He stared at her, and she met his eyes in the twilight, the woman's soul full revealed in her face. "I think you are a thousand miles above me," he said, "but I love you. Oh, how I love you." He stepped close to her. "Do you understand?"

"I understand," she whispered; and hid her eyes from his burning gaze.

"And I will have you now," he said, stretching out his arms. "I shall have you now—oh, at last!"

Held in his arms he kissed her many times; and presently he murmured, "This makes up for all—but I'm not worth it—oh, dear heart, how I love you!" and caught her closer yet, and kissed her again.

The smithy was very dark when she pushed him a little away, but he could see her sweet face tremulously happy. "I forget your shoulder and your head," she said. "This won't do. I must take better care of you." She looked at the smithy door, a lighter patch in the darkness. "Oh, Conrad, I have so much to tell you—but I forget, you're not Conrad, but a great nobleman now."

"And you're to be that nobleman's wife," he said.

"Do you think I would make a Lady?" she asked mischievously.

"I know you will make the one lady in the world for me," he answered, and drew her back to him. "My Lady Romsey—how sweet that sounds! But my wife sounds sweetest of all."

"I like to hear you say that," she whispered, close to him.

So he repeated it many times, until Oliver Pipe came stumbling through the door of the harness-shop. "Conrad!" he called, "Lord Romsey!" Then, catching sight of them, he added hastily, "Oh, I ask your pardon."

"It must be very late," said Sally, drawing away, "long past time for supper."

"But," protested Romsey, still holding her hand, "I've so much to say."

"You shall say it to-morrow—and the next day—and the day after that—and so on," she assured him, and slipping her hand from his, she went through the smithy doorway into the starlit Court.

"This was a great day's work, my lord," said Oliver Pipe.

"Yes, a great day's work," assented Romsey, and he too went out into the Court, and followed Sally with his eyes until she reached her house.

[THE END]

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